

**EDITORIAL POLITRICKS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF SELECTED  
NEWSPAPERS' COVERAGE OF THE ANC, DA AND EFF DURING THE 2016  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA.**

By

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submitted in accordance with the requirements

for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

in the subject of

**Communication Science**

at the

University of South Africa

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November 2017

## DECLARATION

I Nkosingathi Msiza declare that: **Editorial Politricks: A Content Analysis of Selected Newspapers' Coverage of the ANC, DA and EFF During the 2016 Local Government Elections in South Africa** is my own work and that the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

To God Almighty; He makes all things possible.

To my love, my dove, my pillar, my strength – my queen; thank you for inspiring and believing in me. To my sons; Nkosisphile and Nkosikhona; you are my light. To my parents; thank you for all the lessons. My grade 1 teacher; Mrs. Nhlapho, thank you for instilling the love of learning. To my previous line managers, colleagues and friends; thank you for the support, opportunity and creating the space I needed.

To my supervisors; Dr. Sonderling and Professor Khan, thank you for the guidance.

## ABSTRACT

Global research shows that media owners tend to influence the editorial direction of their newspapers. Such influence generally tends to be in line with the media owner's economic and / or political interests. Naturally, this is a challenge because media is regarded as the fourth estate and is supposed to be an objective yet effective channel for the citizenry to make informed decisions about their world. The study seeks to find out if the owners of four daily newspapers in South Africa, based on their political proximity; may have influenced their newspapers to be biased in favour or against any of the three biggest political parties contesting the 2016 Local Government Elections. This study is an exploratory and descriptive content analysis based on an Agenda Setting theoretic framework – supported by framing analysis and game framing. Findings reveal the correlation between the media owner's interests and the biased reporting within their respective newspaper. This suggests that although media may not be directly or explicitly forced to adopt a specific ideology, it can be argued that political relations with media owners can influence editorial decisions. Therefore, it can be inferred that media owners of *The New Age*, *The Citizen* and *The Star* influenced editorial content of their newspapers during the 2016 local government elections. Given the findings of this study and the elections scheduled for 2019 in South Africa, it is important for more political communication studies to be conducted in order to establish guidelines for unbiased news reporting across all media – including newspapers. Alternatively, to compel media owners to declare their bias towards and against specific political parties in each news content, upfront. Particularly important during election period, is the need for each media (including newspapers) to have an independent editor – potentially one from the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to ensure that each piece of content produced is validated as bias or impartial.

**KEY TERMS:** Agenda Setting Theory; Bias; Framing Analysis; Game Framing; Content Analysis; Local Government Elections

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

ANC	African National Congress
ACDP	African Christian Democratic Party
COO	Chief Operating Officer
DA	Democratic Alliance
EFF	Economic Freedom Fighters
IEC	Independent Electoral Commission
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
LGE	Local Government Elections
SA	South Africa
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation



## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The 2016 Local Government Elections (LGE) in South Africa presented one of the most effective opportunities to conduct political communication research to determine the scope and nature of influence or bias induced by newspaper owners, especially since the said elections were the most anticipated and highly contested, and therefore most indicative political milestone since 1994.

According to Jamal (2016:4) “the Independent Electoral Commission recorded a 65% increase in the number of participating parties since 2011 and a 12% rise in candidates”. Such an increase in the number of political parties contesting the elections can be viewed not only as an indicator of the people’s dissatisfaction with the major political parties, but also a potential way of reducing the number of votes for the main parties as competition increases.

For almost two decades, the African National Congress (ANC) had enjoyed support of the majority of the electorate in South Africa, albeit regressive over time. The Democratic Alliance (DA) gained popularity in the mid - 2000s, and the newcomer; the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) has demonstrated notable growth since its formation in 2013.

How and to what extent can media ownership determine or influence editorial direction, position and support for political parties? Can it result in biased reporting? History shows that media ownership has resulted in editorial bias which was in line with the views of a specific political party. For instance, some have argued that the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has been used as a propaganda instrument by the African National Congress (ANC) political administration. Similar examples have been shown in other countries as well, for instance, Waldahl (2004: 183) posits that “it was not ZANU (PF) that the paper had decided to support in the campaign, but rather the principal shareholders in Zimpapers, the Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe.” Similarly, some have complained that the media in South Africa is antagonistic towards the ruling party (the ANC) and others have accused the same media of being the government’s propaganda instrument.

As evidenced in the literature review of this study, media owners tend to influence the editorial direction of their newspapers. Such influence generally tends to be in line with the interests of

the media owners, be they economic or political interests. Further demonstrated in the literature review and theoretical sections of this study, bias, especially when applied by a presumably independent fourth estate can be a subtle yet effective way of deliberately presenting impartial information, which recipients could base their decisions upon.

For this reason, this study is imperative. The study seeks to find out if the owners of four daily newspapers in South Africa, based on their political proximity; may have influenced their newspapers to be biased in favour or against any of the three biggest political parties contesting the 2016 Local Government Elections, namely the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF).

The selected newspapers were chosen based on their similarity in terms of circulation figures, frequency, target market, as well as a difference in ownership which enabled a comparative analysis. The selected political parties are the three biggest political parties based on the number of votes received in previous elections.

This is a cross sectional study spanning between 18 July and 5 August 2016. This was the most intensive election campaigning period leading up to the election date on 03 August culminating with the announcement of results on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2016. The selected period witnessed the largest number of news articles about the local government elections as the political parties gave a final push to get votes and newspapers focused on this, in so doing, driving their own sales and other potential interests and agendas. This study seeks to ascertain if the primary shareholders of the selected newspapers might have influenced the editorial direction of their newspapers because of their association with a particular political party. The rest of this chapter discusses the study's sub-problems, research questions and assumptions. It concludes with an overview of the subsequent chapters.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The primary interest of this research is whether ownership structures of a newspaper can influence the editorial direction or create political bias for or against a political candidate or political party. In other words, can ownership have a bearing on the electorate's considerations and influence their voting choices at the polls? A historical example is that of Italian media mogul - turned politician; Silvio Berlusconi who established a political party in January 1994 and used his media influence to lead his party to election victory by March of the same year. According to Fairclough (1995) "that was largely the result of his control of the Italian media". Similarly, this research seeks to ascertain if any of the major political parties contesting the 2016 Local Government Elections in South Africa had undue editorial advantage in the newspapers where the political parties have ownership influence.

## **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The study aims to determine if politics influenced the editorial direction adopted by the four major daily newspapers in South Africa during the 2016 local government elections.

### **1.3.1 Objectives of the study**

The study seeks to ascertain whether editorial bias that may have been applied by one or more South African newspapers in their coverage of the 2016 LGE held in South Africa. Should there be material editorial bias identified in the selected newspapers towards or against any of the selected political parties, the research will seek to ascertain the extent to which this could be attributed to the political party they favour. The contention of the study is that media owners can and may influence editorial opinion and news policies. For example, Severin and Tankard (1988:317) argue that in a predominately capitalist economy such as the United States, owners have power over editorial news selection and when this happens, the socio-economic imbalances tend to prevail and in so doing, establish or maintain a particular ideology of the ruling elite. This influence can be direct or indirect and includes media owners, for instance, when employing journalists that share and perpetuate the owner's ideology.

#### **1.4 Concept of Editorial Politricks**

Lazitski (2014:01) defines “*media endarkenment*” as “a process of media influence that ultimately shrinks the potential for a vibrant public sphere where informed citizens debate crucial issues.” In this study, the researcher has coined the term *Editorial politricks* and defines it as the media owner’s deliberate use of their media to subliminally drive specific editorial assertions and agendas which maintain and / or advance their political and economic interests. In other words, politricks is a multi-layered term that implies ‘corporate politics’ leads to biased news reporting based on the media owner’s political interests. When this occurs, news no longer serves its primary role of informing the citizenry, but rather becomes an instrument in the hands of the particular shareholders and can be used to serve their specific economic and / or political interests. The second layer of the concept implies that the media ‘tricks’ its audience through carefully crafted messages and/or omissions within the newspaper’s editorial content that is designed to create specific view which is subjective and is aligned with the media owner’s preferences and interests. This study used a mixed method (qualitative and quantitative approach) to ascertain if there has been any editorial politricks during the 2016 Local Government Elections in South Africa.

#### **1.5 Background to the research problem**

Political communication is a broad and interdisciplinary subject that speaks to any form of discourse related to politics. This ranges from the creation, sending and receiving of information related to politics, between politicians, media and the general public. For instance, when politicians engage their constituents, it is a form of political communication. Similarly, when citizens discuss the social conditions as a result of the political situation they find themselves in, this too is a form of political communication. Likewise, when media produce political news, it is a form of political communication. As suggested by Schulz (2008) “the consumption of political media content is a form of political communication too”.

While the political communication process can be a continuous feedback loop which originates anywhere between the public, media and politicians, this study is particularly interested in the exchange process driven by the media and its potential influence on how and what the electorate thought was channeled during the 2016 LGE.

Notably, the media, and in the case of this study - the selected newspapers; are the intermediaries between the political parties and the voters. Working from the agenda setting assumption that the media is capable of telling people what to think about, as well as framing analysis perspective that suggests that media can shape how people think, the relevance of political communication in this study is to enable the researcher to assess if the media ownership influenced the content in the selected newspapers during the 2016 Local Government Elections.

### **1.6 Research problem**

The South African constitution guarantees the freedom of expression for all and regards the media's role as important whereby the media are expected to be impartial and independent in order to safeguard the democracy of its citizenry through fair, factual reporting. Newspapers are generally regarded as independent sources of balanced information and facts designed to empower citizens so that they make objective decisions about matters within their environment.

However, news reporting on political parties seems to be a contentious issue in South Africa. Various political parties, journalists and members of the business community have accused some sections of the South African media of being biased towards the ANC led government. They have alleged that certain media are a propaganda instrument in the hands of the ruling political party. These accusations have centred on the ANC's influence on certain media based on the relationships which ANC members seem to have with the owners of the said media organisations. Interestingly, in certain instances, it is the ANC itself that has proclaimed that certain media is reporting unfairly on it and is biased against other political parties.

There are various media reports which suggest that South African media are often unduly influenced by their owners. Amongst such, is media coverage in the *Mail & Guardian* (2017) and *IOL* (2017) that points to the intimate relationship between the ANC President, Mr. Zuma and the Gupta family which owns *The New Age*. According to these reports, the relationship often results in their newspaper reporting favourably on the ANC than other political parties. These media reports have insufficient academic literature to substantiate either side of the argument.

This study is an exploratory and descriptive content analysis of the following newspapers; *The Star*, *Sowetan*, *The Citizen*, and *The New Age*'s reportage of the three major political parties, namely; the African National Congress (ANC), Democratic Alliance (DA) and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) during the 2016 Local Government Elections (LGE) in South Africa. It is a cross sectional study between 18 July and 05 August 2016 a period marked by intense campaigning which received unprecedented media attention.

It seeks to ascertain whether any of the selected newspapers had an editorial bias towards any of the selected political parties as a consequence of the proximity of the owners of these newspapers to particular political parties.

### **1.7 Sub-problems**

- Which newspaper/s showed editorial bias, and towards which political party?
- Which newspaper/s had no editorial bias towards any political party?
- Can any inferences be drawn between the coverage in each newspaper and each of the political parties?

### **1.8 Importance of the study**

There are a number of factors that influence socio-economic conditions. Politics is one of the most critical influences in this regard. In fact, it can be argued that the development of a country rests on its political decisions. Based on the South African constitution, only democratically elected parties can affect government policies. Therefore, government policies are influenced by the number of seats that political parties have and their ability to use such voting rights within parliament to establish, maintain or revoke policies.

As mentioned earlier it is the electorate that votes for parties to have seats in parliament. The more seats a political party has in parliament, the more influence it has in the decision making processes and policies which affect society and the economy. Therefore, the media plays a fundamental role in the socio-economic context of the country because media has the potential to influence how people think, and in so doing, how they vote.

## **1.9 Limitations**

- Only news articles and images contained in the main body of the newspaper, and related to the 2016 LGE in South African were analysed
- Advertisements, cartoons, opinion pieces, analysis, comments, letters to the editor and the sports section were excluded. There are too many factors that influence these content pieces which include political parties' budgets and number of active supporters are not the same, as such, it would be expected that the number of adverts, opinion pieces as well as letters to the editor would not be the same in terms of quantity and quality.
- Only print versions of the morning edition of the newspaper were included.
- Pictures were only analysed quantitatively and not qualitatively, as the latter is beyond the scope of this study.

## **1.10 Scope of the study**

The study will cover the editorial content, only related to The ANC, DA and EFF across *The Sowetan*, *The Citizen*, *The Star* and *The New Age* only. The time period will be from 18 July until 05 August 2016.

## **1.11 Assumptions**

- There is editorial bias in one or more of the selected newspapers, towards one of more of the selected political parties.
- There is a correlation between editorial bias in one or more of the selected newspapers and it is based on the owners' political proximity to one of the selected political parties.

### **1.12 Chapter outline**

This study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the study and covers the purpose, context, research problem, limitations, assumptions and various other key components of the study. Chapter 2 reviews literature related to the study in order to establish findings of earlier researchers as well as establish any knowledge gaps in relation to newspaper editorial bias in political reporting and the influence of political ownership. This will be followed by Chapter 3 which outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study. Chapter 4 discusses the methodical approach adopted in this study while Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study based on methodology applied.

Chapter 6, which is the last chapter gives the overall summary and conclusion to the study, and in so doing confirming / or dispelling the hypothesis that the newspapers selected for this study influenced the editorial direction in favour of one or more political parties during the 2016 Local Government Elections in South Africa because of their proximity to a particular political party. The study demonstrates the contribution of this study to the body of knowledge on political communications, especially within the South African context.

### **1.13 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a context for this study and introduced the concept of *editorial politricks*. This was followed by a definition of the research problem which seeks to establish if and to what extent media owners of particular newspapers exerted any editorial influence on their newspapers to favour or be biased against certain political parties during the 2016 Local Government Elections. The proximity of the ANC's president to the owners of one of the newspapers sample for this study (*The New Age*) provides a basis for some of the assumptions made in this study and supports the view that the ANC received positive reportage from *The New Age* more than the other political parties.



## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to critically review literature on how media owners influence the editorial direction in their newspapers and especially during election times. This is a deliberate attempt to explore what has already been published on the research topic at hand - which seeks to ascertain whether any of the selected newspapers had an editorial bias towards any of the selected political parties contesting the 2016 Local Government Elections, and whether there is any relationship between any of these political parties and the owners of the newspapers. The literature review entails a critical review of previous studies related to the topic under study. From this review of literature, the researcher is able to identify how other scholars have approached the research problem of editorial bias and influence of ownership on news content. In addition, the researcher seeks to identify potential theories and methodologies from the literature review which can be applied in the study.

The discussion begins with an overview of the impact of ownership on editorial direction. Thereafter, the issue of biased reporting is explored comprehensively. In both these sections, the researcher will begin with a general overview of the topic, then highlight the key issues identified, how issues were approached and the key findings therein.

### **2.2 Impact of ownership on editorial direction**

To understand the potential impact of ownership of newspapers on editorial positions, the researcher reviewed and analysed literature from various scholars, including Akhavan-Majid, Rife and Gopinath (1991), Fradgley and Niebauer (1995) and Hanretty (2014).

Akhavan-Majid et al. (1991:59) analysed the editorial positions taken by 56 newspapers in the United States on three public issues in 1989. In conducting the research, they selected three issues which received coverage across the targeted media, and created a questionnaire for the editors to ascertain their decision making process. To assess the editorial positions adopted, the researchers identified controversial issues which were more likely to feature in the various newspapers and the probability of such issues requiring a “clear-cut editorial position” (1991: 62).

The researchers did not explicitly segment the different types of editorial control, but suggest that although there is insufficient empirical evidence to describe and confirm potential editorial influence, there have been instances of unintentional influence which suggests that the potential for it to happen cannot be irrevocably ruled out. They assert that the media owners are aware of the fear of editorial influence and have made various commitments to uphold editorial independence, albeit impossible to guarantee. They suggest that this can still happen, for instance, when organisations hire ‘like-minded’ editors who then go and make similar editorial decisions (1991: 66). For the purposes of this study, it could imply that by hiring like-minded editors, the media owners of the selected newspapers could indirectly influence how their newspaper reports on the ANC, DA or EFF.

Hanretty (2014: 335) reviewed 211 print and broadcast media across 32 European countries to understand the level of ownership influence. The study suggested that the influence of media owners can take place at different levels, ranging from within the newsroom to the management boardrooms (2014: 338). A survey was conducted wherein media experts were asked various questions relating to the potential influence of media owners (Hanretty, 2014: 344). One of the questions was; “how much the political coverage in is the [relevant] media outlet influenced by its owners?” Unfortunately, the answer to the aforementioned question is not provided in the findings of the study.

However, what is clear from the findings is that the greater the concentration of voting power within the organisation, the greater the degree of owner influence. Therefore, this suggests that owners do influence editorial direction, especially in newspapers that are individually owned or where the ownership is in the hands of the few, for instance, *The New Age* is wholly owned by the Gupta family. This phenomenon is proving to be the case with the newspapers in the current study.

Fradgley and Niebauer (1995: 902) explored the correlation between the type of newspaper ownership and news reporting patterns in four major “quality” newspapers in London in 1987, 1989 and 1991. They studied four daily newspapers from London, to distinguish between conglomerate owned and independent newspapers. Furthermore, a qualitative content analysis was applied to ascertain which source of information as well as the probability of reporting on conflict was dependent on which ownership model.

In their study, they make reference to a time when the British government had established a commission to regulate media ownership, yet it did not consistently enforce its own mandate. The study cites an example wherein a newspaper was sold without the approval of this commission because the buyer of the newspaper had previously supported the British government. Fradgley and Niebauer (1995: 903) assert that “this resulted in the new owner having 37 percent of the national daily newspaper market and 41 percent of the Sunday Market”.

According to Fradgley and Niebauer (1995), British newspapers tend to be associated with a particular political party or at least demonstrate specific political views. This indictment further justifies the need for the study at hand and gives evidence of potential economic benefits emanating from the newspaper owners’ editorial influence, which creates or sustains good and mutually beneficial relations with a political party. In fact, the *Mail & Guardian* (2013) reported that a significant amount of *The New Age*’s income stems from events and newspaper subscriptions predominantly funded by the ANC led - government and its parastatals.

Fradgley and Niebauer (1995) also note an instance wherein a media owner forced an editor to resign from their newspaper, and the independent directors could not intervene in the matter. For the purposes of the study at hand, this exemplifies the power of direct editorial influence by the owners of newspapers and that any contradiction to their views may result in employees being unceremoniously dismissed.

Fradgley and Niebauer (1995) also found that independently owned newspapers had more conflict articles than conglomerate-owned newspapers. In addition, they found that conglomerate-owned newspapers rely more on routine information sources than do independently owned newspapers. For the purposes of the current study, this could imply that newspapers with less proximity to politically exposed owners may report in a more balanced manner and tend to use a range of diverse sources of information than their counterparts.

All the aforementioned researchers come to similar conclusions. Akhavan-Majid et al. (1991: 4) conclude that the media owner’s voice will inevitably influence the editorial direction. They argue that even through indirect control, ownership can unintentionally influence a number of individual or collective elements which ultimately perpetuates a specific ideology evidenced in news content.

Hanretty (2014: 349) recorded similar findings which implied that in order to reduce editorial influence by the owners, the shareholding should be less concentrated in the hands of a few, thus encouraging editorial independence through a diversity of voices leading to more balanced ownership models.

Fradgley and Niebauer (1995: 903) suggest that “political influences on the press also exacerbate the potential for control over the “fourth estate.” This is an important point given that the newspapers in the study at hand are also concentrated within the hands of a few owners.

### **2.3 Establishing bias**

To determine the extent of political bias, the researcher reviewed various studies by Sullivan (2008), Stromback and Shehata (2007) and Bhim (2015). All these scholars studied bias in election news coverage across different countries, namely New Zealand, Switzerland, Britain and Fiji.

Sullivan (2008: 9) defines bias as “favouring one perspective over another” and explored newspaper representations of an emerging minority Maori political party during the 2005 elections in New Zealand, in order to establish if newspaper coverage on the Maori Party was biased. The data was gathered from three major newspapers. The issue of newspaper ownership and its potential influence on editorial direction emerged and similarly also found that there was a concentration of media ownership in New Zealand.

A qualitative content analysis was conducted in relation to the Maori Party based on the various articles, including news, stories, images, cartoons and opinion pieces in the period leading up to the elections. Sullivan (2008: 139) assessed articles for “bias, balance, accuracy and fairness, attitude and tone, image and text relationship”. An estimated 40% of the articles were found to be biased against the Maori Party as the findings provide a comprehensive record of how many articles were published on the party and how many were accompanied by a cartoon, picture or image. As Sullivan (2008: 140) suggests, “it’s an example of vested interest reporting aimed at Pakeha readership.” This is not necessarily surprising, especially because most of the coverage about the minority group (Maori) was predominantly presented by and in Pakeha media. With regards to the study at hand, the aforementioned could be inferred to mean that bias can be

caused by vested interests. As such, the media owner's interests could lead to biased reporting. As established earlier in the literature review, such interests could be economic, as was the case for British media as well as the article published by the *Mail & Guardian* about *The New Age's* significant source of income emanating from the ANC led-government and parastatals.

Stromback and Shehata (2007: 791) investigated media reports on the 2002 Swedish and 2005 British elections by analysing three newspapers in each country and compared election news coverage across two countries which have different media and political systems. They used quantitative content analysis wherein (with the exception of one newspaper) the primary criteria was that the article should start or be referenced on the front page. The analysis focused on structural bias ownership and how it is evidenced through framing. Various scholars have defined structural bias as the deliberate exclusion of certain topics in favour of other coverage in line with the particular medium or goal.

Stromback and Shehata (2007) argued that different political systems influence media reportage, processes and policies. Their findings suggest that British media would focus more on individuals and conflict reporting than on substantive election matters, especially when compared to Sweden where they have a party-centred than individual focus political system. As such, British newspapers tend to apply game framing as a result of the British media industry being more profit driven than the Swedish system. This raises a fundamental question regarding the South African political system as well as media practices that are consistent across the various media. However, the answer to the aforementioned question is beyond the scope of the study at hand.

Stromback and Shehata (2007: 803) suggest that "structural bias is the framing of politics as a strategic game rather than as issues. The same holds true for the journalistic tendency to apply episodic rather than thematic frames." As a result, the scholars compared the degree to which this would apply in the framing of elections in the two countries. This is an interesting view to reflect upon for the present study. Understanding the degree to which the South African newspapers would focus on framing during the 2016 LGE as competition between parties rather than the amount of coverage dedicated to election issues will be a key unit of analysis. In addition, the understanding of how news is framed as events rather than as themes such as election campaigning as opposed to the political parties' ability to distinguish themselves and deliver on their manifestos will also be a key insight.

Bhim (2015: 109) analysed various media content and campaigning processes and results of the 2014 Fiji elections. The assessment contrasted what happened in Fiji with the universal definition of what constitutes free and fair elections. The study recorded a lot of media intimidation.

Although post-apartheid South African media has not been subjected to the same level or type of intimidation as recorded in Fiji, it can be argued that, as reported in various media such as *Media24* (2013) the “Secrecy Bill” as well as “Sunshine Journalism” (*Mail & Guardian*: 2013) perpetuated by the ANC led government are evidence of political influence on editorial direction. While the ANC may not directly own the newspapers selected for the current study, the political party could be indirectly influencing editorial direction and creating bias through relationships it may have with certain media owners. This is another way to view the very same research problem of this study, i.e. how media owners, and in this case newspaper owners’ relationships with political parties may have created bias towards or against any of the political parties that contested the 2016 LGE. As noted by Fradgley and Niebauer (1995: 903) “a newspaper that leans towards the party that controls the government might rely more on official press releases rather than seeking out the views of the opposition, the ministries, or other interested sources.” While there is no expectation that reporters may have been intimidated to be biased towards any of the political parties, they may have been directly or indirectly influenced by the media owners.

The influence of owners does not only exert influence at an editorial level, but also has an economic impact as the ANC led government is one of the key advertisers in many newspapers. It also has personal implications for journalists, as some newspapers are partly owned by the ANC led government. In addition, some journalists have career ambitions which could include working in the state-owned media enterprises. As a result, extensive negative reporting on the government could disadvantage the newspaper and/or journalist, which is an example of indirect influence.

To identify priority topics in the media during the 1968 American presidential campaign, McComb and Shaw (1971: 178) grouped items according to “major and “minor” levels. The amount of space and the position where an article featured were used to ascertain which topics were prioritised in print media. In this regard, space relates to the number of words or the length

allocated to an article. Position relates to where an article is placed within a newspaper. Stromback and Shehata (2007: 791) used the position of an article as a unit of analysis as noted earlier. Prime locations such as the front page, the top part of the page as well as articles that are on the right hand side of a newspaper enjoy more prominence and are therefore deemed more important as they are also easier to locate.

The present study focuses on space and position as units of analysis. The higher the frequency of prime space and position allocated to a particular political party the higher the priority that is afforded to that party, which, if the same pattern persists when reviewing other units of analysis could suggest editorial bias towards a specific political party in any or all of the newspapers under review.

In reviewing media frames related to land reform in Zimbabwe, Mushore (2012: 74) used textual analysis and inferred that state funded newspapers' editorial positions are likely to be influenced by the government's ideology.

In studying the frames within media coverage of the US and Russian presidential campaigns, Lazitski (2014: 914) divided news frames into "generic and issue specific" groups, which included categories and their definitions such as "human interest, economic consequences, conflict/scandal, morality, race/fight" Similarly, Stromback (2007: 55) divided frames into "issue frame, game frame, scandal frame, trivia, and other". Furthermore, Kendall (2011: 12) examined newspapers to identify key words and phrases such as "working class, elites, and middle class to identify a range of articles containing some specific acknowledgement of class location or socioeconomic status."

The present study adopts the following frames as units of analysis as articulated by Lazitski (2014: 914) and Kendall (2011:12):

- Issue frames - focus on political issues, social conditions requiring political action, or political discussions where the substance consisted of issues and issue-related questions. This includes economic consequences such as financial management by the political party. How a specific newspaper positions a political party on such issues, especially when compared to how the other selected newspapers presenting the same story could indicate bias.
- Conflict / scandal frame – to ascertain how the media reported on the political party and / or the politicians' conduct. The amount and frequency of articles and how a specific

newspaper frames stories about a political party's misgivings could indicate bias, especially if the rest of the other newspapers have notably different tone and volumes on the same story.

- Game frames – focus on election campaign process and outcomes. The articles focused on polls and treat politicians or parties as strategic actors mainly interested in winning and avoiding losing. Game frames also entail centrality of performance, style and perceptions of the politicians or the parties and a focus on campaign and / or power struggling strategies or tactics. When looking at all the coverage in a specific newspaper, a comparison on the amount of coverage and the tone of the reportage in relation to a particular party could be an indication of bias, particularly if a newspaper takes a materially different view on the same party compared to the other newspapers.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The literature review on editorial bias based on the influence of media owners on editorial position has provided a number of key insights. The literature suggests that bias can be caused by vested interests, and therefore, the media owner's interests could lead to biased reporting. Such interest will predominantly be economic for the media owner, while it has a socio-political advantage for the concerned political party. As evidenced in the *Mail & Guardian's* report about *The New Age* publication mentioned in this chapter, the funding model of the newspaper has a bearing on its editorial position. As a result, the media owner's voice will inevitably influence the editorial direction, in pursuit of their financial goals and as noted by Fradgley and Niebauer (1995), it is not uncommon for British media to be associated with a particular political party. Given the widely reported relationship between the owners of *The New Age* and the ANC's president Jacob Zuma, it should not be a complete surprise should this study uncover that *The New Age* was biased in favour of the ANC during the 2016 local government elections.

Fradgley and Niebauer (1995) suggest that "political influences on the press also exacerbate the potential for control over the Fourth Estate". Even through indirect control, ownership can influence a number of individual or collective elements which ultimately perpetuates specific views found in news content. Owners influence editorial direction, especially in newspapers that are individually owned or the ownership is in the hands of the few. Independently owned newspapers tend to have more conflict articles than conglomerate-owned newspapers. In addition, independently owned newspapers use more diverse information sources such as



industry, respected subject matter experts or a variety of different and sometimes opposing views. On the other hand, conglomerate-owned newspapers more often rely on general or standard and predictable sources of information, such as the spokesperson of the organisations and the affected person.

Political systems can influence editorial processes and result in media focusing more on individuals and conflict reporting rather than substantive election matters, especially in countries where the political system is influenced more by the individual rather than the political party involved.

Therefore, it is evident that there have been a lot of global studies on editorial and bias, yet the researcher has not been able to locate any material research within the South African context. The lack of such research within South Africa makes this study imperative.

It was also observed that various researchers various methodologies including mixed methods and also focused on several different aspects in their attempt to study newspaper bias and these aspects including space, the position of articles within a newspaper, the tone in the headlines and body of the article, the use or lack of images as well as the frames highlighted in the articles.

## **CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the theories related to the study. The theories are informed by the literature review conducted in the previous chapter. The cited scholars used the identified theories to determine bias and /or how media owners and their proximity to a particular interest may influence editorial content.

Given that this study relates to media, the main theory underpinning this study is agenda setting theory. Other theories relevant to the study include framing analysis and game framing which are both related to agenda setting, although they explore different aspects of agenda setting and focus on different units of analysis. These theories ground the study and provide the approach in which to conduct the research.

### **3.2 Agenda Setting Theory**

Maxwell McCombs has made considerable contributions to agenda setting theory thereby making significant contributions to the study of political communication. The theory is premised on the notion that by reporting on certain issues, the media plays a very influential role in shaping what people think about. In other words, media may not dictate how people think, however, it can influence what they think about. As such, media can play a role in the socialisation of its target audiences.

McCombs and Shaw (1971: 176) suggest that media dictate what is deemed important by broadcasting and / or publishing what is worth discussing, in so doing, setting the agenda of what people talk about. Kuypers (2002: 198) further asserts that media also shapes what people think about. Therefore, agenda setting is about how the media shapes what people think.

The theory provides a framework to quantitatively and qualitatively explore and describe media frames and editorial positions of each newspaper on each of the political parties selected for the study. McCombs (2014: 40) notes that “the unit of analysis on each agenda is an object, a public issue.” Therefore, there are several ‘objects’ such as the number of articles on each

political party, the use or omission of sources and images, the issues discussed and the tone of the article in relation to a particular issue or political entity. Any and all of these may shape the way readers think about each political party in this study.

Agenda-setting provides a methodical approach to review which issues were accentuated by the newspapers and which ones were downplayed and which issues could be in favour of or disadvantage a political party or parties. McCombs (2014: 118) found that the more people talk about a candidate (salience) then the media will pay more attention to that candidate. On the other hand, if no one talks about a candidate then the media will also be silent and ignore that candidate. Wigston (1995: 70) suggests that news is a curated product based on the journalist's views, values and mandate. This means that news is not always an objective and fact-based record of events, but rather a product which is influenced by a journalist's perceptions, preferences and work prescripts. And when this happens, news tends to be biased. Therefore, it is easy to see how such institutional and personal motives can influence the reporting of the different political parties during the 2016 LGE.

McCombs, Holbert, Kioussis and Wanta (2011: 30) suggest that there are numerous elements that influence a reader through media coverage. These include the objects and subjects covered, what is highlighted and omitted and how issues and people are framed within news reports. McCombs (2014: 2) suggests that "cues about the salience of topics in the news agenda can be found in the lead story on the front page, the size of the headlines, and even the length of the articles".

In the context of the current study, it stands to reason that the amount of coverage a candidate is given, for instance, the EFF leaders; and depending on the tonality and issues associated with the candidate, may have an influence on the electorate's choices. How these attributes of news agendas influence the public agenda is the second level of agenda-setting (McCombs, 2014: 41).

In this study, these agendas could be the various issues ranging from service delivery, access to basic human rights and services, education and the triple threats of unemployment, inequality and poverty.

As highlighted earlier in the literature review, media owners are more likely to be the ones that

set the agenda rather than the journalists. Hanretty (2014: 338) found that the influence of media owners can take place at different levels, ranging from within the newsroom to the boardroom. On the other hand, Akhavan-Majid et al. (1991: 4) distinguished different types of editorial influence, namely; potential, actual, direct, and indirect.

It is seldom that the journalists could be the ones who set the media agenda because in the end; each newspaper is signed off by the Editor-in-Chief who is accountable to management, which in turn reports to the board, which ultimately executes the mandate of the shareholders. This makes it more challenging for journalists to go against the agenda set by the media owners. Instances where journalists have tried to go against the wishes of the owners have often led to frustration, expulsion or expensive and protracted labour law disputes, as exemplified by the eight South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) journalists who defied the decision of the Chief Operations Officer (COO) not to broadcast violent protests against predominantly ANC led municipalities (Areff, 2016). This fear of personal and professional inconvenience often results in a lot of journalist complying with the editorial direction set by the media owners. In so doing, the agenda set by the media owners permeates.

### **3.3 Framing Analysis**

Framing analysis is similar to agenda-setting in the sense that it relates to the second level of agenda setting whereby the media use particular interpretive frameworks on selected issues or events in order to create perceptions in the minds of the electorate. As Finn-Maenda (2016: 28) suggests, “the significance of framing in news stories becomes clearer when the influential agenda setting role of the mass media is considered.” Pan and Kosicki (1993; 70) suggest that framing analysis “shares with agenda-setting research a focus on the public policy issues in the news and in voters' minds.”

However, it is equally important to understand the distinction between agenda setting and framing. Agenda setting assumes that media tells the people what to think about. On the other hand, framing theory explains how the media determines how people think. In other words, agenda setting focuses on what people think and talk about while framing is centred on how news is assembled in such a way that makes specific information more important than others, sometimes by highlighting or omitting certain information or positioning it as positive, negative

or neutral. Pan and Kosicki (1993: 70) argue that framing transcends what people think and discuss and explores how people think and talk.

Framing analysis establishes how the media positions specific issues to influence how people think. It is the manner in which media effectively highlight certain information and omit other detail in such a way that can influence how the audience views the information presented. Framing issues and selecting, or omitting, or highlighting certain information over other information can lead to biased reporting. In essence, the manner in which issues or topics are positioned as positive or negative within an article will have a bearing in the manner in which the audience views and responds to a specific matter.

Kuypers (2002: 198) suggests that “frames are central organising ideas within a narrative account of an issue or event. Frames are composed of certain keywords, metaphors, concepts and symbols; they work by highlighting some features of reality over others”. As a result, the manner in which issues or topics are positioned as positive or negative within an article, as well as the space and position afforded to an article will influence how the audience views and responds to the specific article. Kendall (2011:7) affirms this notion in that “media framing describes the process by which media...package information and entertainment before presenting it to the audience.”

Kuypers (2002: 7) posits that “facts remain neutral until framed.” Therefore, media are the ones that turn data into a perspective which shapes public opinion and thought. This means that the journalist takes a particular view towards the facts, which eliminates other possible views and establishes the particular view expressed by applying a specific lens through which readers may see the information presented.

One of the techniques used by journalists to create specific perceptions is by labelling subjects for instance, tyrants, fearless, charismatic, and intelligent and so on. Pan and Kosiski (1993: 62) note that “by using [the phrase] ‘Iraqi dictator’ for example, a news report places Saddam Hussein in the same category with Hitler, Noriega, Stalin, and other generally hated men in American culture.” In the current study, newspapers could focus on “scandal and / or economic consequence” as frames to highlight the manner in which the ANC handled its president’s

expensive and controversial homestead wherein the monies could have built more schools in the surrounding impoverished communities instead.

The selection of frames could be determined by the ideological preferences and interests of the newspaper's owners. The manner in which issues related to the ANC, DA and / or EFF are framed by the selected newspapers could have a bearing on how the electorate views the parties. According to Wigston (1995: 70) "news is a processed, structured product based on three elements; the event, the journalist's perception of that event, the values and prerequisites of the broadcast organisation in deciding to use the report of the event."

The fact that frames highlight certain features over others within an article, and where the article is placed in a newspaper; for instance, in the front page or top right section, the length (measured in centimeters and columns) and the tonality of the article, the headline, the use or lack of pictures, illustrations or cartoons, the key assertions made and the person(s) being quoted - all have a bearing on how the audience may perceive the candidate, subject(s) and the topics within the article. Pan and Kosicki (1993: 65) share this view by suggesting that "one would measure the location and length of the article and combine the findings with those from other articles." For instance, how issues related to ANC, DA and / or EFF are framed by the aforementioned newspapers, could have a bearing on how the electorate views these political parties.

### **3.4 Game Framing**

Another layer of framing is known as game framing. Game framing refers to the manner in which media coverage may tend to focus on elections as competition between political parties, instead of reporting on substantive discussion on election issues. Stromback, Aalberg and de Vreese (2011: 162) posit that "a key concept in research on the media coverage of politics is the game or strategy frame."

A number of social scientists argue that media coverage of politics tends to focus on who is winning or losing the elections – the tactics and strategies employed by the parties to win the elections rather than reportage on the substantive issue such as the political parties' manifestoes and the socio-economic which the electorate should know about. Stromback et al. (2011: 165) suggest that "framing politics as a strategic game reflects journalism's enduring focus on

drama, conflict and negativity...Analysis of policy visions and issues may on the other hand appear stale and repetitive.” Various scholars have argued that the majority of journalists are not adept in the substantive political issues hence they choose to focus on sensationalising politics by focusing on opinion polls and potential election outcomes and present news for its entertainment rather than its empowerment value.

Adapting the approach taken by Stromback et al. (2011: 167) the researcher will categorise media coverage according to themes related to policy issues, audience reactions, scandal, election information, strategy, campaign events, polls, predictions, endorsements, voter choice, fundraising, and spending. It is useful to understand the extent to which the selected media focused on game or issue frames, and how the identified direction relates to the newspapers owners’ relationship and or interests in a particular political party. For instance, focusing on game rather than issue frames could lead people to focus more on ensuring that a specific political party wins – irrespective of the merit of its policies. To achieve this, media owners could focus more on game frames by conducting and/or publishing surveys and opinion polls which position the political party of their choice as the party to vote for. Alternatively, media owners with a specific goal or agenda could focus on ensuring that they influence their newspapers to avoid certain issue frames that may be regarded as negative about their associated political party, and instead, focus on issue frames that positively position their political party.

Through a unit of analysis, this study will quantify the number of times “issues” frames are used in contrast to the number of times “game” frames are used in all the identified articles and emerging themes, in order to establish the editorial direction of the selected media. This study will also explore whether an interpretive or descriptive reporting style was employed by the various newspapers. For instance, is the coverage describing what happens during the 2016 LGE or does it make conclusions and remarks about the events unfolding; in short, how much of what is being reported is factual versus opinion led?

### 3.5 Ideology

Ideology can be defined as a way to shape how people view the world and define belief systems and values. The term ideology was made popular by Karl Marx, a German philosopher who studied power relations within society and how the “means of production” were created and distributed to maintain particular social structures and institutions. His work is known as Marxism and concerns itself with the power struggles between the elite few and the majority working class. Marxism suggests that media ownership by a few powerful agents contributes to the maintenance or establishment of a status quo, as desired by those that have the resources to influence outcomes.

Ideology is closely linked to agenda setting and framing analysis. The agenda adopted by a specific newspaper is a result of the ideology that the newspaper seeks to perpetuate. How and which information about the political parties is framed - positioned, prioritised or omitted; is a deliberate attempt to form a particular ideology in the minds of the readers of that newspaper. This means that the information published in newspapers may be biased towards or against a specific political party and not necessarily be an objective record of events and actors therein. This is the manner in which media owners and their close associates can influence what and how people think, and in so doing, establish or maintain the desired socio-economic and / or political goals, through the effective use of media. Marx argued that the wealthy sought to maintain their powerful positions through strategies and resources designed to maintain the status quo, what Antonio Gramsci referred to as ‘hegemony’. The notion centres on what he termed the “dominant coalition” and how it establishes the social structures and subsequent power relations.

In the present study it can be argued that a political party, through its relationship with a media owner can create bias and drive a particular ideology by influencing the editorial coverage of that newspaper during elections. This could take many forms, one being the manner in which a newspaper provides far more positive articles about a particular political party and their achievements and ability to improve the lives of the electorate. Another way could be not providing adequate media coverage about other political parties and their accomplishments, election campaigns or manifestos. As evidenced in the agenda setting theory discussion earlier, media has a great role to play in shaping what and how people think about the world and themselves. According to Croteau, Hoynes and Milan (2012:48) “it is impossible to understand most social and political issues today without understanding how the media influence the



perception and discussion of these issues.” As suggested by the former editor of the *Business Day* publication, “it is also such institutions that create the regimen that guides regular behaviour and causes people to adhere to a moral code without even having to think about it too much” (Zibi, 2014).

There are a number of other prolific scholars who have built on the work of Marxism. Amongst them are Harold Adam Innis, Theodor Ardono and the Frankfurt School. Innis suggested that history shows that culture and all its attributes have always been supported and endorsed by their socio-economic and political structures. Babe (2009) affirms Innis’s view that the discourse around media ownership is central to political and economic dominance. According to Babe (2009:72) Innis coined the phrase “monopolies of knowledge” which characterised media ownership and control as being in the hands of a few, as well as how this shaped the formation of knowledge in society and how people’s views and understanding were formed.

This re-affirms the agenda setting theory and suggests that the media plays a critical role in the construction of what society considers as reality. In fact, Berger and Luckmann (1966:13) affirm this notion and suggest that “reality is socially constructed”. Consequently, media transmits and maintains reality through framing and agenda setting, as per the ideology driven by the dominant coalition. This relates to the works of another seminal author on media studies; Marshal McLuhan who argued that the platform or manner in which information is disseminated influences the very same message being conveyed. McLuhan suggests that the medium determines the message or is in itself the message. As noted earlier, how media positions information through the use of, for example images, or lack thereof, can be very powerful.

Croteau, Hoynes and Milan’s (2012) concern about who owns the media, is a significant inquiry about the politics and economics around media, which seeks to create an equilibrium. As demonstrated in the literature review and pursuant with the research problem of this study, media owners can indirectly influence editorial direction through news content and operational processes such as employing like - minded journalists who share their ideology and political views and thus there is no need for the owner to directly tell them how they must report. An example of coercion and direct influence is listed in the earlier section of this study whereby SABC journalists were dismissed from work for not complying with the instructions of the media owners, namely, the ANC led government (Areff, 2016).

The Frankfurt School was concerned with ‘the spiral of silence’ which relates to matters such as the example stated above, namely - the ‘silencing of opposing views’ and perpetuating a particular and dominant view. According to Babe (2009) Frankfurt theorists denied that knowledge can ever be “value-free”. It always had to serve a purpose. In other words, they suggest that there is an agenda to every story in the media. As such, the media will often focus on escapism and mind-numbing content instead of empowering information and discussions on actual societal issues that require discourse to create a more equitable society. This relates to how the dominant coalition would use their media ownership to frame issues during elections. By so doing, this can influence what and how people think as they prepare to cast their votes.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter discussed theories upon which the current study is anchored in order to understand how and why media owners can use their respective newspapers to create editorial bias towards or against political parties. Agenda Setting was identified as the main theory underpinning the study. According to the theory, media tends to inform what people think about. Therefore, media owners can derive economic benefits by getting voters to think about a specific political party. In fact, it is more profitable for the media owners when they can get the electorate to think in a specific way about a specific political party. This is where the second theory which was discussed, namely, framing analysis becomes important. Framing suggests that the way information is presented within news is a deliberate effort aimed at creating a specific impression in the mind of the reader. As such, news can be positive, neutral or negative, based on how it is framed.

Furthermore, this chapter examined the way elections can be positioned through issue or game frames. By focusing on issue frames, the readers of the selected newspapers will be able to review the three main political parties contesting the 2016 LGE in South Africa through the substantive issues. If the focus is more on the game frame, the news will come across more as a race and competition, and in so doing, provide the readers with less information, but rather more entertainment value on the campaign proceedings by the various political parties.

Furthermore, this chapter suggests that none of the editorial choices adopted by the selected newspapers can be incidental. In fact, it is likely that they are part of a well-orchestrated ideology by a few powerful agents who control a significant amount of resources, and use media and other institutions to establish and maintain their desires. This chapter demonstrated how ideology relates to agenda setting and framing analysis. In short, the agenda within a specific newspaper stems from the ideology driven by the media owner of the said newspaper. This influences the way in which the political parties are framed in the coverage leading up to and during the 2016 LGE in SA.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the coverage produced by the selected newspapers during the 2016 LGE in South Africa was most likely biased towards or against a specific political party and not necessarily be an objective record of events and actors therein. According to the theories discussed, this is how media owners influence editorial content to maintain their mutually beneficial relations with the political party of their choice.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

Adopting Stromback's (2007: 55) approach this study is an exploratory and descriptive content analysis of *The Star*, *Sowetan*, *The Citizen* and *The New Age*'s media coverage of the ANC, DA and EFF during the 2016 Local Government Elections in South Africa. It seeks to ascertain if any of the selected newspapers had an editorial bias towards any of the political parties and how this can be said to correlate with their political relationships. The study is therefore, based on a content analysis of newspaper articles between 18 July and 5 August 2016.

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Content analysis of news is regarded as one of the most effective and widely used media and political communication research methods. It is a structured approach to grouping and analysing messages and to understand their effects and/or implications. It applies both quantitative and qualitative approaches that can be replicated or duplicated by other researchers doing similar studies. It can be used to explain and/or describe the why, what, who and the how of message effects. It is able to dissect messages into various parts which can be reviewed in order to enable the researcher to deduce and/or infer specific relationships between variables which may otherwise not be so obvious. It provides descriptive cues on the effects of specific messages.

Agenda setting and framing analysis were used as the primary theories underpinning this study. The central organising thought within agenda setting theory is that the media plays a powerful role in formulating what people think about. By prioritising and publishing specific news instead of others, it brings certain topics and information to the fore of people's thoughts and conversations. This implies that the more coverage there is on a specific political party, the more likely that it could be 'top of mind' for voters – especially when positioned favourably. Therefore, the content on the political parties within the selected newspapers will provide various quantitative units of analysis as discussed in later on in this chapter.

Framing analysis is the other key theory to be used to review the qualitative units of analysis in this study. As explained in Chapter 3, framing analysis suggests that the media's ability to position issues and omit others in a specific way can influence how people think. As such, how issues are framed as positive, neutral or negative can result in biased reporting and affect how audiences interpret and react based on the news they read.

## 4.2 Target Population

Population refers to the potential number of newspapers to be selected. There are 25 newspapers published and distributed across South Africa every weekday (Audit Bureau of Circulations in South Africa: 2017). There were also 200 political parties contesting the 2016 LGE in South Africa (Jamal; 2016: 4). The newspapers and political parties listed above constitute the total target population of this study.

### 4.2.1 Accessible population

Accessible population can be defined as the sum of all the units of analysis – namely the four newspapers (*The Star*, *The New Age*, *The Citizen* and *The Sowetan*) and the three political parties (ANC, DA and EFF) of which the researcher has access to and are derived from the target population. Given the large target population of this study, the accessible population was selected based on the prominence of the political parties.

The focus was on media frames about the ANC, DA and EFF between 18 July until 05 August 2016, in *The Star*, *Sowetan*, *The Citizen* and *The New Age*. The previous election results demonstrated that the ANC and DA were the largest political parties, based on the respective number of votes they received. According to recent media reports, the EFF was the third biggest political party. The newspapers were selected based on their high circulation figures as well as the diversity of ownership in terms of and difference in owners - as illustrated in Table 1 below. This approach is adapted from McMenamin, Flynn, O'Malley and Rafter (2012: 173).

**Table 1: Newspaper Profiles**

<b>Name of publication</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Main Shareholders</b>	<b>Circulation (as at March 2016)</b>	<b>Demographic profile</b>
<i>The Star</i>	Independent Media	Sekunjalo Media Consortium is the main shareholder. It is an investment holdings company with ties to private families involved in oil and gas exploration. Other shareholders include Government Employee Pension Fund and Interacom Investment Holding Limited	86833	Predominantly male dominated, readership is fairly evenly split across LSM 6 – LSM 10, with core market predominantly within the ages of 35 – 49. Cover politics, business, sports, and lifestyle and rely on revenue from advertising and circulation.
<i>Sowetan</i>	Times Media Group.	Tiso Blackstar Group, a global company with its roots in Africa, operating market-leading media, broadcast and retail marketing properties.	90165	
<i>Citizen</i>	Caxton	Moolman and Coburn Partnership (majority shareholding). Moolman is said to be in the news because it is speculated that he is in alliance with ANC's deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa, and former ANC National Executive Committee member Tokyo Sexwale. The two are rumored to be in support of the current ANC president.	51700	
<i>The New Age</i>	Gupta family	Gupta Family – which is presumed to have a very close business and personal relationships with key members of the ANC	Claimed print order 100 000	

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations South Africa 2015

#### *4.2.2 Timeframe*

This is a cross sectional study. Data collection was from 18 July until 05 August 2016, comprising of two weeks of intense election campaigning before Election Day on 03 August, and ends on the day when all the election results were recorded on 05 August.

Adopting approaches employed by Bonini and Morello (2014: 68) and Sullivan (2008: 8), the four weekly newspapers were reviewed over 15 weekdays leading up to, and including the week of the Local Government Elections which took place on 03 August 2016, thus translating to a total of 60 editions across the four newspapers gathered over a period of 15 working days (Mondays to Fridays).

#### *4.2.3 Sampling Method*

This study employs a non-probability sampling method wherein the findings cannot be generalized. Qualitative and quantitative methods, consisting of relatively small, purposive samples from four newspapers and three political parties will be used. Given the sheer number of newspapers and political parties available, this is a convenient sample because it characterizes the newspapers and political parties as the largest in the country.

All articles in the main body of the selected newspapers (excluding opinion pieces and cartoons) which relate to any of the selected political parties, within the aforementioned timeframe will be part of the sample.

#### *4.2.4 Quantitative Units of Analysis*

To assess bias, the study adopted several units of analysis from Sullivan (2008) Stromback and Shehata (2007) as well as McComb and Shaw (1971), namely:

- Number of articles per political party.
- Number of articles in or referenced on the front page.
- Number of images per political party in each newspaper.
- Space and position. The amount of space and prime position an article occupies signals its importance. This study reviewed the number of articles on each and all the political parties as well as where the articles per political party were placed.

**Table 2: Bias and Editorial Position Assessment**

PARTY	NEWSPAPER	NUMBER OF ARTICLES	PRIORITISATION/POSITION OF ARTICLES						IMAGES	TONALITY		
			Front Page	In the Headline	Second page: Left	Third page: Right	Any page after: (Top)	Any page after: Bottom		POSITIVE	NEUTRAL	NEGATIVE
ANC	Sowetan	58	4	20	0	3	18	13	27	7	21	30
	<i>The Citizen</i>	93	11	36	4	11	21	10	36	10	29	54
	<i>The Star</i>	93	9	35	11	0	17	21	36	14	43	36
	<i>The New Age</i>	151	10	49	5	11	40	36	93	73	59	19
ANC TOTALS		395	34	140	20	25	40	80	192	104	152	139
DA	Sowetan	26	0	6	3	1	6	7	7	8	13	5
	<i>The Citizen</i>	60	6	25	3	2	16	8	19	18	31	11
	<i>The Star</i>	53	6	14	1	0	14	18	15	15	31	7
	<i>The New Age</i>	64	9	13	3	5	20	14	20	13	32	19
DA TOTALS		203	21	58	10	8	56	47	61	54	107	42
EFF	Sowetan	21	1	9	0	1	4	6	8	7	11	3
	<i>The Citizen</i>	40	4	14	5	2	11	4	12	12	23	5
	<i>The Star</i>	34	4	10	1	0	9	10	6	9	24	1
	<i>The New Age</i>	26	4	5	1	2	7	7	10	4	18	4
EFF TOTALS		121	13	38	7	5	36	27	36	42	76	13

Table 2 illustrates how the quantitative units of analysis were assembled and counted to provide the total for each party per newspaper and broadly in order to explore bias and editorial alignment of each newspaper to each political party.

#### 4.2.5 Qualitative Units of Analysis

To assess frames and infer the potential owner's influence on editorial stance based on their political proximity, the study adopted some of Lazitski (2014: 914) and Kendall's (2011:12) units of analysis, namely:

- Issue frames – which focus on political issues, social conditions requiring political action, or political discussions where the substance consisted of issues and issue-related questions. This includes economic consequences such as financial management by the political party.
- Conflict / scandal frame to ascertain how the media reported on the political institution and/or the politicians' conduct.
- Game frames – focus on the election campaign process and outcomes. If the articles focused on polls and treated politicians or parties as strategic actors mainly interested in winning and avoiding losing, if there was centrality on performance, style and



perceptions of the politicians or the parties, and if there was a focus on campaign and/or power struggling strategies or tactics.

### **4.3 Data Collection Techniques**

The researcher collected and analysed all the hard copies of the selected newspapers between 18 August and 05 August 2016. In total, 719 newspaper articles were analysed. The analysis was based on units identified in the preceding sections.

#### *4.3.1 Quantitative content analysis*

The quantitative content analysis was based on the steps adapted from Wimmer and Dominick (1991: 162) as follows:

- Step 1 - Construct the categories of content to be analysed. These categories are the newspaper reports on the three political parties, namely, ANC, DA and EFF as well as the four selected newspapers, i.e. *The Star*, *The New Age*, *Sowetan* and *The Citizen*.
- Step 2 - Establish a quantification system which has all the fields which will be used to group all the data points to be coded and tabulated in order to provide findings. (See Table 3).
- Step 3 - Train coders and conduct the pilot study. The researcher assembled all the quantitative units of analysis by identifying key words (names of the political parties and local government elections) then manually counting the number of articles related to each political party in each edition of the selected newspapers.
- Step 4 - Code the content according to established definitions. (See Table 3)

**Table 3: Coding Schedule**

CATEGORIES	DESCRIPTION	
NUMBER OF ARTICLES	Every single news items is considered in its own right.	
TONALITY	<b>Positive</b>	On balance, the article portrays a good image of the political party. Examples include the good work the party has done or if it has been positively received by its stakeholders.
	<b>Neutral</b>	On balance, the article focuses on facts and does not venture into creating a specific image.
	<b>Negative</b>	On balance, the article creates a concerning image of the political party. Examples include focusing on unfavourable declining supporters or municipalities which the party may lose or are not adequately managed.
PRIORITISATION (OF ARTICLE)	<b>Front Page</b>	First page of the publication.
	<b>Leading</b>	Compared to other articles related to this study, this article appears first when reading the entire publication from the first to the last page. In the case where more than one party is listed in the same article, which party appears first in the article and or dominates the same article.
	<b>Secondary</b>	Compared to other articles related to this study, this article appears after similar articles when reading the entire publication from the first to the last page. In the case where more than one party is listed in the same article, which party appears last in the article and/or is least mentioned in the same article.
NUMBER OF IMAGES	There is a picture and or an illustration associated with article.	

#### 4.3.2 Framing analysis

The researcher reviewed all the newspapers published during the purposefully selected dates to get a sense of how each political party was represented in each newspaper.

This was based on the position, the use or lack of an image or tone as reflected by the key words in the headline and opening paragraphs of the article, and the key assertions made in the article, as well as the exclusion of certain topics or political party in favour of another topic or party on the front page. In addition, the same articles were reviewed to ascertain the game and / or issue frames (see Table 6). Similarly, these were contrasted with the ownership structure of each newspaper and its proximity to each political party. The emerging patterns were then be contrasted with the ownership of each newspaper and its association to each political party (see Table 1).

#### 4.3.3 Quantitative Data Analysis

The researcher adopted the coding process from Stromback and Shehata (2007: 805) as follows:

- The number of articles and images, the position of the articles and the tonality and the articles.
- Only articles, pictures and illustrations published in the main body of the publications were included.
- Letters to the editor, *op ed* or opinion pieces were excluded.

#### 4.3.4 Qualitative Data Analysis

Through framing analysis, the researcher purposefully selected all the newspapers published on 27 July (a week after sampling started) to get a sense of how each political party was represented in each newspaper by evaluating the position, the use or lack of an image, tone as reflected by the key words in the headline and opening paragraphs of the article, and the key assertions made in the article, as well as the exclusion of certain topics or political party in favour of another topic or party on the front page.

**Table 4: Positioning of political parties within newspapers**

PARTY	NEWSPAPER	PRIORITISATION/POSITION OF ARTICLES						IMAGES	TONALITY		
		Front Page	In the Headline	Second page: Left	Third page: Right	Any page after (Top)	Any page after: Bottom		POSITIVE	NEUTRAL	NEGATIVE
ANC	Sowetan		5	2			1	3			8
	<i>The Citizen</i>		2	1		1	1	3	1		3
	<i>The Star</i>	1	2			1	1	1		1	4
	<i>The New Age</i>		5			3	2	6	8	1	1
DA	Sowetan		1	2					3		
	<i>The Citizen</i>		3			1		2	1	1	2
	<i>The Star</i>	1				2		1	2	1	
	<i>The New Age</i>		2		1	1		1	1	1	2
EFF	Sowetan		1						1		
	<i>The Citizen</i>		1	1			1		1		
	<i>The Star</i>	1	1					1	1	1	
	<i>The New Age</i>		1								1

The emerging themes would determine the analysis and interpretation of the data. For instance, should the researcher discover that *The New Age* only covered one political party in some or any of the purposively selected editions, the analysis would look completely different than it would if all parties were reported on in some or all the randomly selected editions. However, by all accounts, the analysis as well as the interpretation explored how each newspaper represented each party as well as how all the newspapers reflected on all the parties, and which party may have been positioned more favourably than others, as well as the proximity of such favourable coverage to the ownership structure of the newspaper.

**Table 5: Key assertions**

DATE	NEWSPAPER	KEY ASSERTION
27 July	Citizen	<p>ANC seriously challenged - Page 2</p> <p>Lack of leadership in the ANC - Page 2</p> <p>DA confident of victory despite violet protests in its municipality - Page 2</p> <p>DA guns for ANC where it hurts - Page 6</p> <p>DA steals a piece of Madiba magic for votes - Page 6</p> <p>DA violets Mandela's legacy - Page 10</p> <p>Mandela belongs to ANC and is part of liberation cadre - Page 10</p>
	Sowetan	<p>ANC councillor takes ANC to court - Page 5</p> <p>Disgruntled members of the ANC campaign independently – Page 5</p> <p>Fraud investigation against ANC regional chairman – Page 5</p> <p>DA and EFF eating into ANC support – Page 4</p> <p>ANC divided by Inkandla debacle – Page 4</p> <p>ANC General Secretary criticised Western Cape chairman – Page 4</p> <p>ANC municipality boss pockets funds – Page 2</p> <p>Instead of improving, ANC has made municipality worse - Page 2</p>
	<i>The Star</i>	<p>Parties connect with youth via social media – Page 1</p> <p>Voters voice concerns about lack of education, skills and jobs - Page 1</p> <p>DA torch bearer for Madiba – Page 4</p> <p>ANC launches own paper to counter the constantly bad press - Page 4</p> <p>ANC opposes its western cape chairman from returning to work – Page 4</p> <p>Juju is the man in Seshego – Page 4</p>
	<i>The New Age</i>	<p>DA wants to consult on e-tolls – Page 3</p> <p>ANC slams DA's Madiba tactics – Page 4</p> <p>ANC in dispute with its western cape chairman – Page 4</p> <p>Killing of 13 ANC candidates - Page 5</p> <p>Former ANC members re-join party – Page 5</p> <p>ACDP, accuses EFF of foul play- Page 5</p> <p>ANC is the rightful place of Indians and Coloureds – Page 5</p> <p>Taking viewers down ANC memory lane – Page 6</p> <p>Election Fraudster interrogated at ANC offices – Page 6</p> <p>ANC promises a solution to farmers – Page 9</p> <p>Don't worry about job losses - Page 9</p> <p>DA supporters die after putting posters on electric poles – Page 22</p> <p>DA councillors join ANC – Page 22</p> <p>Joy as three get houses from ANC - Page 23</p>

Furthermore, an analysis on the same dates listed above provided clarity on the game and issue frames editorial stance (see table 6). This was analysed against the proximity of each newspaper to its owners.

**Table 6: Game VS Issue Framing Per Newspaper (Qualitative Analysis)**

Frames Types Per Newspaper		<i>The Star</i>			<i>Sowetan</i>			<i>The Citizen</i>			<i>The New Age</i>		
		ANC	DA	EFF	ANC	DA	EFF	ANC	DA	EFF	ANC	DA	EFF
<b>Game Frames</b>	Tactics	2	2	1				2	1		3	1	
	Race/fight	1	1					1	1	1	1	1	1
	Opinion Polls												
	Election Outcomes				1	1	1		1	1	2		
<b>Issue frames</b>	Morality								1				
	Improving Social Conditions			1		2					2		
	Worsening Social Conditions	1			2								
	Economic Consequence										2	1	
	Conflict/Scandal	1			3			4	1		1	1	

#### 4.4 Reliability and Validity

Wimmer and Dominick (1991: 54) suggest that “a measure is reliable if it consistently gives the same answer...it consists of three different components; stability, internal consistency and equivalency”. Their steps are listed and expanded upon below.

- Stability – the researcher analysed, tabulated and recorded the findings twice over a period of two weeks, with a gap of three days in between the two weeks – whereby the same process was conducted for the second time without reflecting on the initial results. Thereafter, the researcher compared the two results to establish consistency as well as the gaps that may have arisen.
- Internal consistency – tables / scales using the various units of analysis wherein (as an example), if one party tends to have higher percentages in more than one unit of analysis, the conclusions drawn from both the units would suggest that they are more reliable.
- Equivalency – the quantitative findings will be reviewed against the qualitative findings to establish any congruencies.

There are four major types of validity, adapted from Wimmer and Dominick (1991: 54), namely

- Predictive validity – a pilot study was conducted to establish if the media would cover the LGE, and if some of the units of analysis for this study would be feasible therein.
- Face validity – all the newspaper articles are readily available should there be a requirement to review them.
- Construct validity – the key theoretical frameworks identified are contained in the literature review section, and the research methodologies thereto, particularly for agenda setting theory were employed in designing and evaluating this study.
- Concurrent validity –the researcher has not identified similar literature on the same topic in South Africa. Therefore, this marker is invalid for this study.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a detailed methodology to this study. It confirmed this study to be an exploratory and descriptive content analysis, with a timeframe ranging from 18 July until 05 August, which was the most intensive election campaign period during the 2016 Local Government Elections. It is during this period that media owners could exert editorial pressure within their newspapers in support of, or against a specific political party.

The parameters of the accessible population have been defined as the four daily newspapers (*The Sowetan*, *The Star*, *The Citizen* and *The New Age*) which have editorial and circulation similarities, yet different owners and reporting on the three largest political parties in South Africa, namely ANC, DA and EFF. News published about the ANC, DA and EFF in *The Sowetan*, *The Star*, *The Citizen* and *The New Age* was based on the qualitative and quantitative units of analysis identified in the study.

## **CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The researcher used quantitative and qualitative units of analysis as defined in the methodology (Chapter 4) of this study to analyse and derive the findings discussed below. Adapting from research by Fradgley and Niebauer (1995: 902) as identified in the literature review chapter earlier, this study had a total of 60 editions of the selected newspapers were reviewed between 18 July and 05 August 2016. Therein, were a total of 719 articles containing one or more of the study's units of analysis. The qualitative analysis produced 42 units of analysis.

In this chapter, the quantitative and qualitative sections begin with a broad overview of the findings before detailing the contrasts between each political party and newspaper. Graphical summaries are used as a preferred visual representation as they provide an effective and efficient way of analysing and comparing data across multiple metrics. An analysis of the findings is provided at the end and forms part of the interpretation, which subsequently leads to the final chapter of this study, the conclusion. The current Chapter begins with the quantitative analysis followed by the qualitative analysis.

### **5.2 Quantitative Findings**

Graphics are used to present related aspects. For example, how many articles are on the front page, which parties are presented there, the tonality for each party per newspaper and which newspaper shows bias.



**Figure 1: Number of articles**

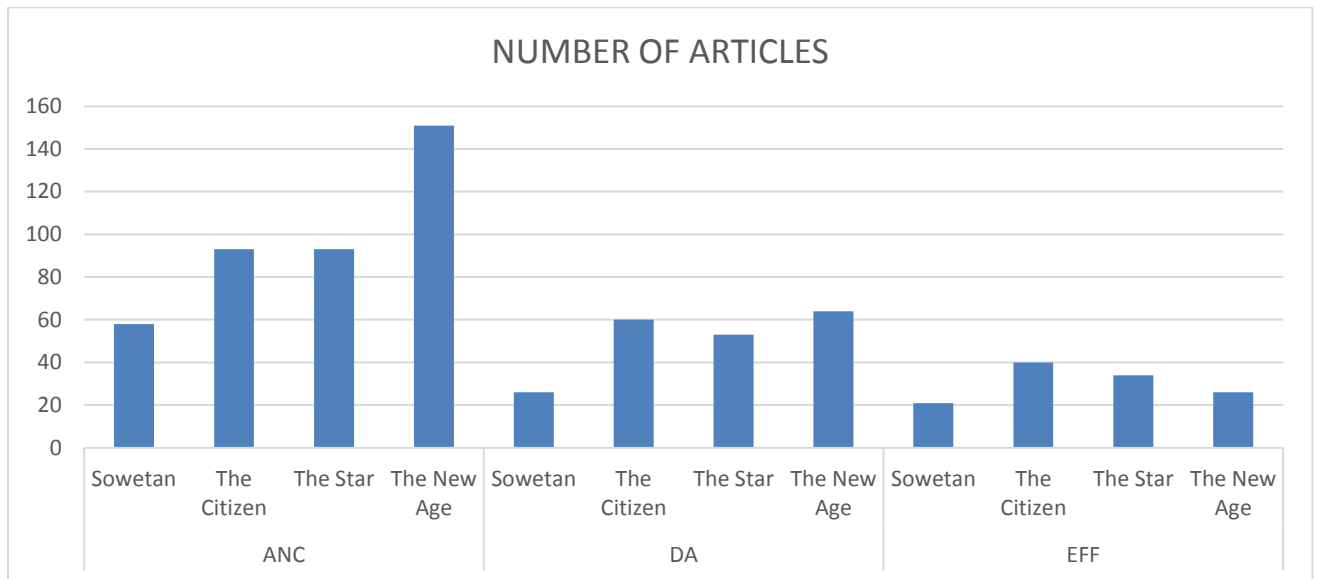
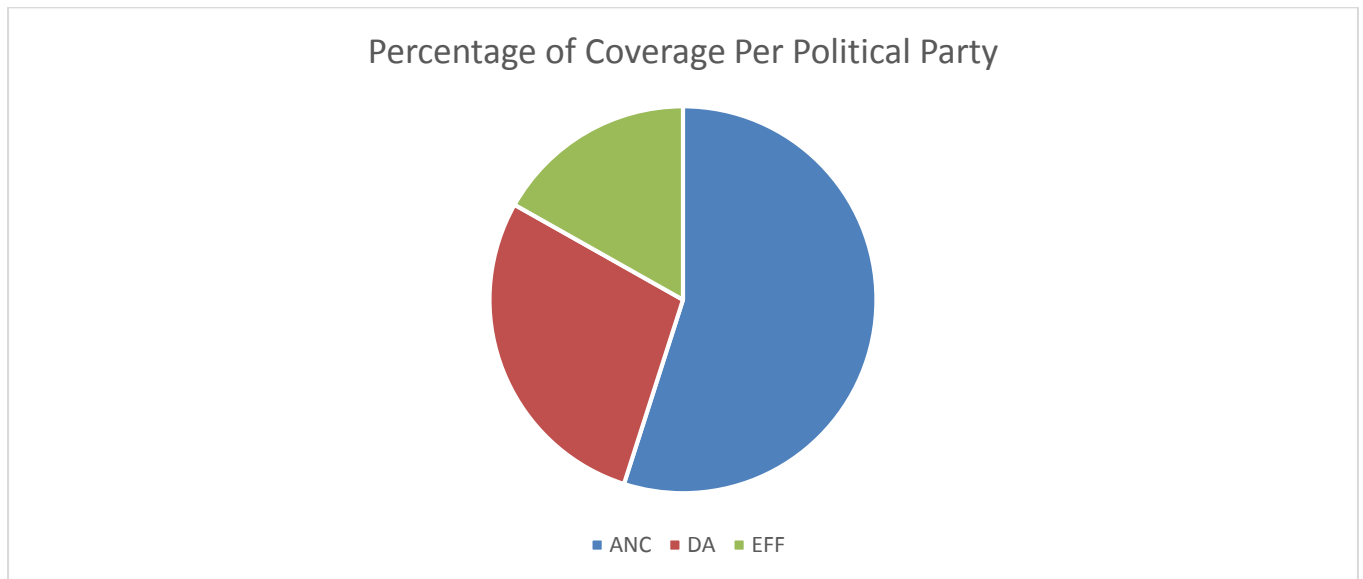


Figure 1 above provides an overview of the number of articles on each political party in all the selected newspapers. As demonstrated, there were 719 articles across all the chosen newspapers selected for this study. Almost a quarter of all the coverage on all the selected parties came from *The New Age* (241), while *The Citizen* had the second highest number of articles (193) and *The Star* (180) and *The Sowetan* (105) had less than half the articles published by *The New Age*. *The Star* and *The Citizen* had similar number of articles on the ANC, which also happens to be more prominent than the DA and EFF in all the newspapers. As illustrated in Figure 2 below, of the total articles, more than half were on the ANC, while 30% were on the DA and the 15% of the articles were on the EFF.

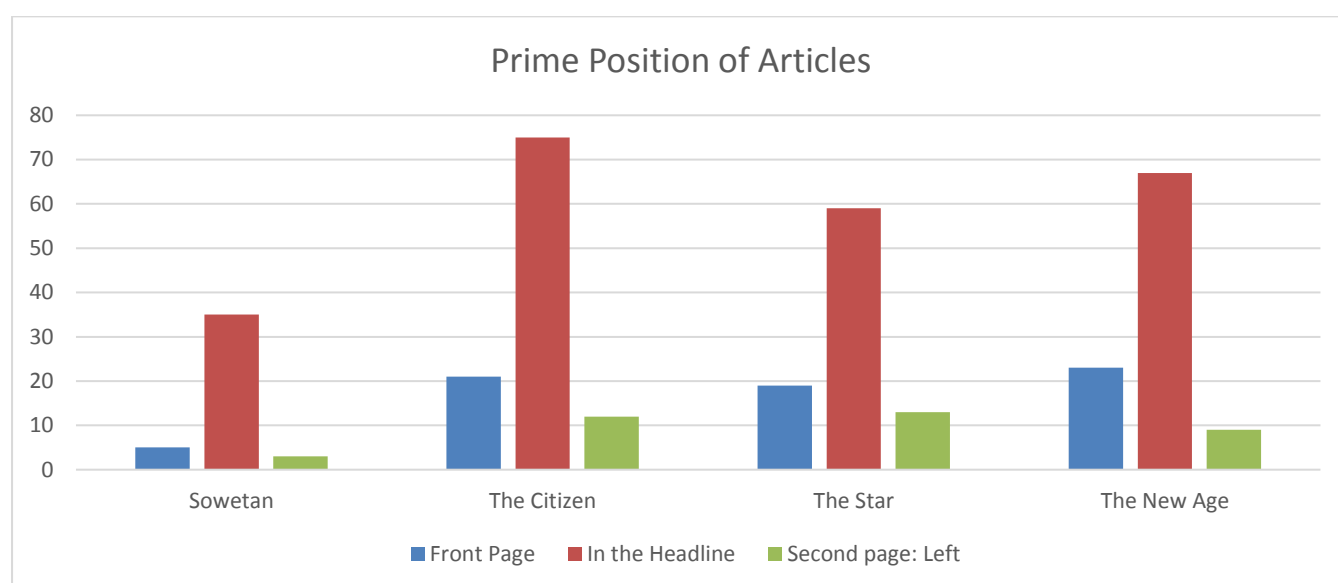
**Figure 2: Percentage of Coverage per Political Party**



After combining the total number of appearances across all the newspapers, the ANC featured in far more articles than the DA and EFF. In fact, the ANC featured in almost double the number of articles as the DA and almost three times more often than the EFF. On the other hand, the DA appeared about 40% more often than the EFF.

As indicated in Figure 2 above, *The Sowetan* carried the least number of articles while *The New Age* had the most articles. *The Citizen* had more units of analysis than *The Star*, albeit the latter having more pages per edition.

**Figure 3: Prime Position of Articles**

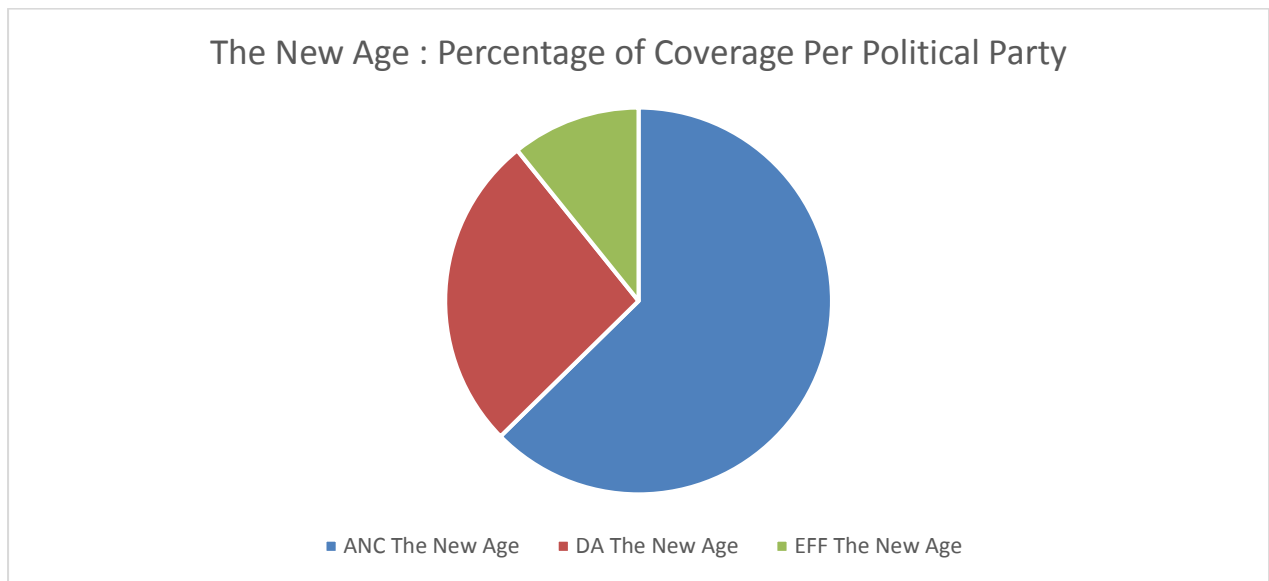


Stromback and Shehata (2007: 791) used quantitative content analysis wherein (with the exception of one newspaper) the primary criteria was that the article should start or be referenced on the front page. Figure 3 above, shows that there were 68 front page articles wherein one or more of the selected political parties were mentioned.

The selected political parties featured in 236 headlines while the majority of the articles were in secondary pages (any page after the third page) with most in the bottom part of the pages across all the selected newspapers. On average, very few articles were found in the primary section (second and third pages) of the selected newspapers. In comparison to other newspapers, *The New Age* had the highest number of front page articles and was closely followed by *The Citizen*. *The Star* had the most second page articles and was closely followed by *The Citizen*. *The Citizen* had by far the most headlines related to the units of analysis of this study. This was followed by *The New Age* and *The Star* respectively.

While *The New Age* had the highest number of articles related to this study, what is equally interesting is that more than 60% of all those articles were about the ANC, with the DA taking only 27% and the EFF receiving just over 11% of all coverage as shown in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4: The New Age – Percentage of coverage per political party**



As shown in Figure 5 below, *The Citizen* had the second largest number of articles, wherein about half of all those articles were about ANC and the *DA* had 31% and the *EFF* had about 21% of all articles.

**Figure 5: The Citizen - Percentage of Coverage per Political Party**

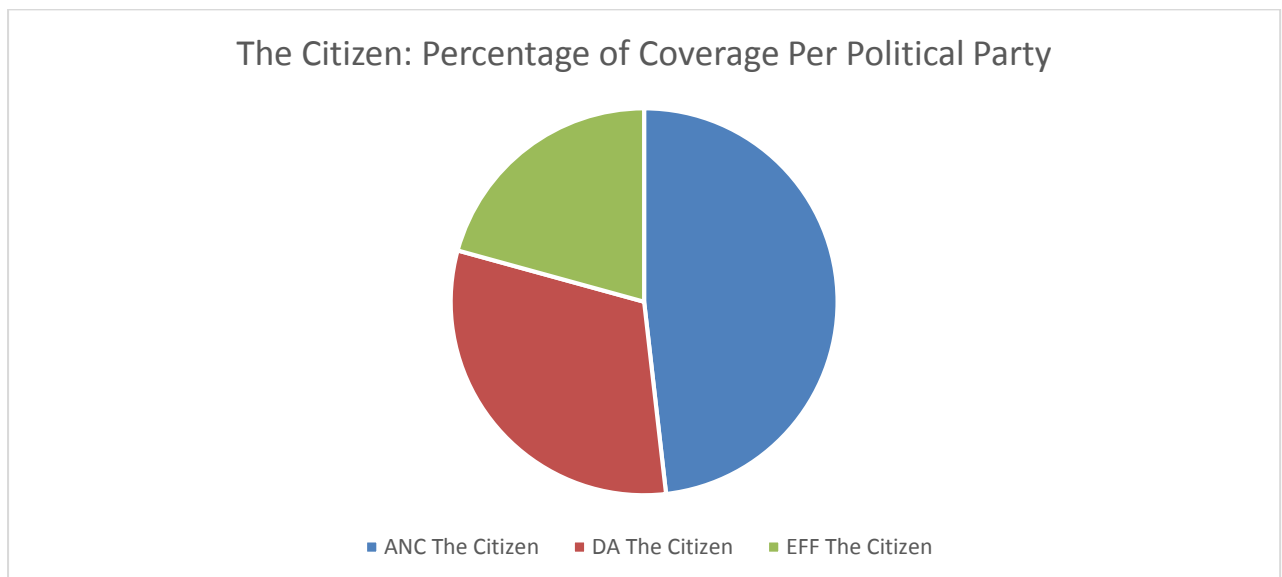
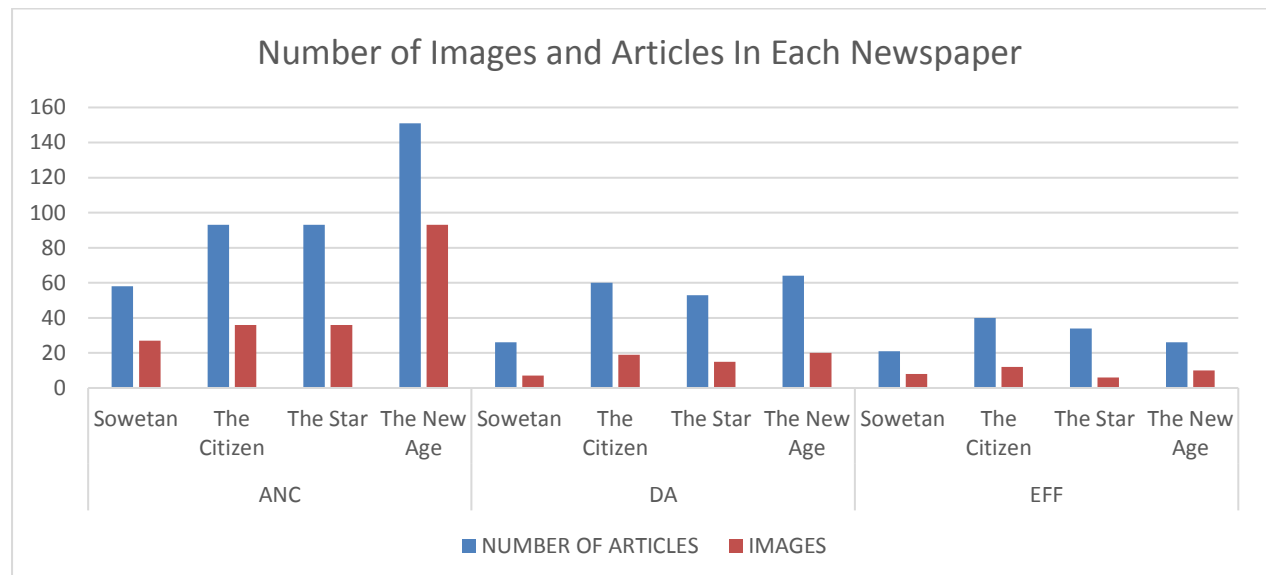


Figure 6 shows that in *The Citizen*, the ANC had more than double the amount of coverage as the DA and almost three times more than the EFF. The difference between the DA and EFF in terms of coverage is only 5%.

Given the ANC's prominence demonstrated by the number of articles across all newspapers, it is natural that the same pattern would also emerge in the prioritisation of articles wherein the ANC enjoyed more prominence across all related variables, including the number of images it featured in.

A similar trend was observed in the number of images per newspaper. Of the total number of images, the ANC had almost three times more images than the DA and the EFF combined shown in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Number of Images and Articles in Each Newspaper**



Part of Sullivan (2008: 139) assessment for bias included images as a unit of analysis. Almost half of the articles in *The New Age* were accompanied by an image while *The Star* and *The Citizen* had a relatively similar number of images which were also predominately about the ANC. *The New Age* (123) had almost double the number of images compared to *The Citizen* (67) and *The Star* (60) combined. There were marginal differences between the number of images in *The Star* and *The Citizen* while *The Sowetan* (42) had the least.

**Figure 7: Images across Newspapers**

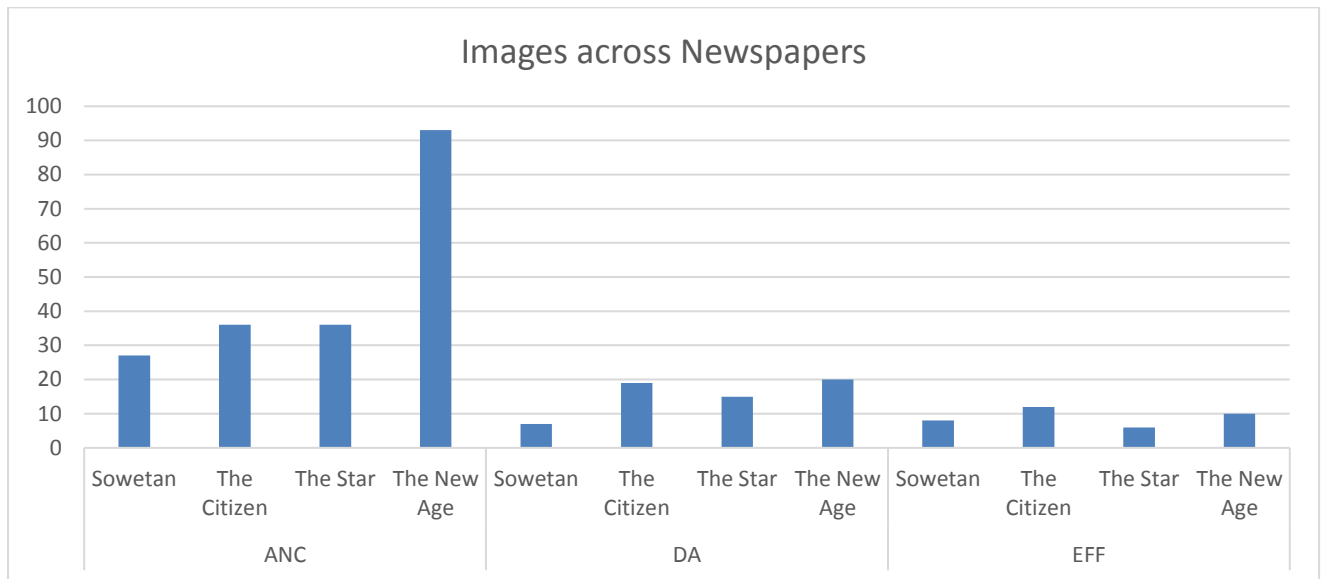
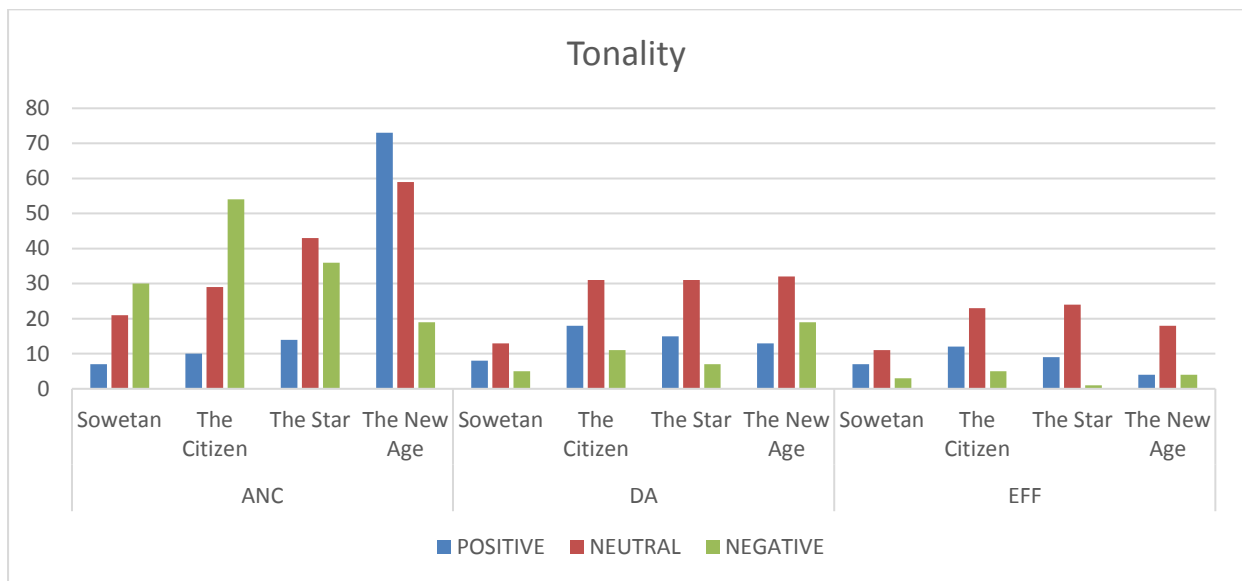


Figure 7 shows that more than 60% of all images in *The Sowetan* were about the ANC, while The DA and The EFF received about 16% and 18% respectively. A similar pattern was observed in *The Citizen* where the ANC dominated with just more than half of all images and the DA receiving about 28%, followed by the EFF receiving less than 18% - in which was similar in *The Sowetan*. *The Star* dedicated the same amount of images as *The Sowetan* to the ANC at about 60%, while the DA received about 25% and the EFF received about 10%. In contrast to all the other newspapers, the difference across all party representation in *The New Age* is once again glaring with about 75% of the total number of images on the ANC, while the DA received about 16% and the EFF received about 9%.

**Figure 8: Tonality**



22 45 38

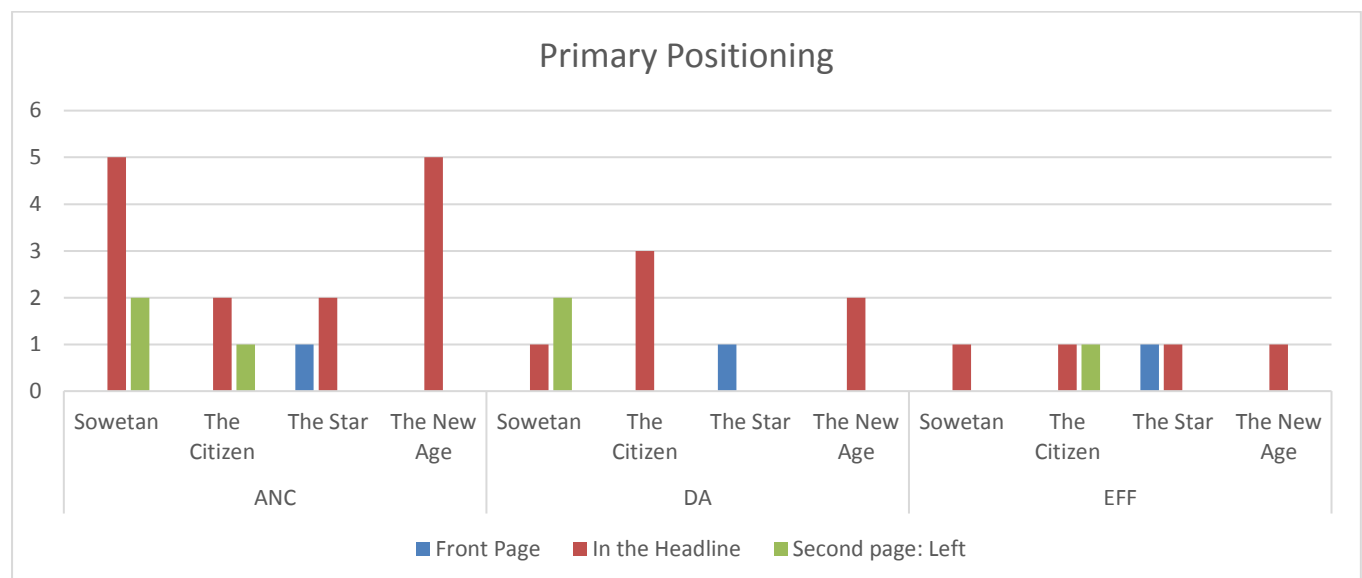
Figure 8 above shows that the tonality in more than half of all the articles was neutral, with the difference evenly spread across positive and negative.

More interestingly is that most of the coverage was neutral to negative on the ANC across all the newspapers except in *The New Age*, where the majority of the coverage was positive, followed by neutral and negative coverage being less than 10%. On the other hand, the DA only received about 20% positive coverage, about 50% being neutral and a 30% negative in *The New Age*. Similarly, the majority of EFF's coverage in *The New Age* was neutral with the balance evenly split across negative and positive. In contrast to *The New Age*, just over half of the DA's and EFF's coverage in *The Citizen* was neutral, followed by 30% being positive and less than 20% being negative for both parties. On the other hand, more than half (54%) of the coverage within *The Star* was neutral with 24% thereof being negative and only 21% positive on all parties. The majority (45%) of coverage in *The Sowetan* was neutral with most of the positive sentiments allocated to EFF and DA, whereas coverage of the ANC was negative therein.

### 5.3 Qualitative findings

Based on the purposefully selected data from 27 July (exactly a week before the elections on 03 August), *The Star* is the only newspaper that had a front-page article. The article focused on the manner in which all the three political parties were using social media to connect with younger voters. The tonality of the article was fairly neutral on all the political parties and included a quote from a spokesperson of each political party. In addition, it broadly described each political parties' campaign tactics aimed at engaging the youth and how the discussions sought to demonstrate how each political party intended to address the youth's primary concerns and interests which related to the issue frame of improving social conditions.

**Figure 9: Primary Position**



Similar to studies by McComb and Shaw (1971: 178) as well as Stromback and Shehata (2007: 791) the position where articles featured were analysed to determine how the selected newspapers prioritised political parties. All the three political parties featured in the headlines on 27 July. The ANC received the same number of headlines in *The Sowetan* and *The New Age*.

Lazitski (2014: 914) as well as Stromback (2007: 55) divided frames into “issue frame, game frame, scandal frame, trivia, and other frames. This study shows that the *The Sowetan* had more negative coverage on the ANC as the article focussed on the conflict / scandal issue frame based on the in-fighting within the political party. *The New Age* reported on the ANC's promise to farmers as well as another article which spoke about the ANC being the most inclusive party



for Indians and Coloureds. These articles focused on the economic consequence and improving social conditions issue frames and positioned the ANC more positively.

*The Citizen* had the highest number (3) of headlines on the DA, most of which were positive and related to the game and issue frame of how the party employed tactics which leveraged Nelson Mandela's ethics to differentiate itself as an inclusive and hard-working political party capable of advancing the former president's legacy. *The Citizen*, was the most negative about the ANC, especially considering that it had relatively smaller volumes when compared to *The Sowetan* and *The New Age*. *The Citizen's* articles focused the ANC's internal conflicts and poor service delivery. This contributed to negative issue frames of conflict and worsening social conditions. It also seems like *The Citizen* did not have much to report on the EFF. In the rare instance that it did, it was positive, but it was part of an article on game framing about the DA campaigning aggressively and confidently for ANC led priority municipalities.

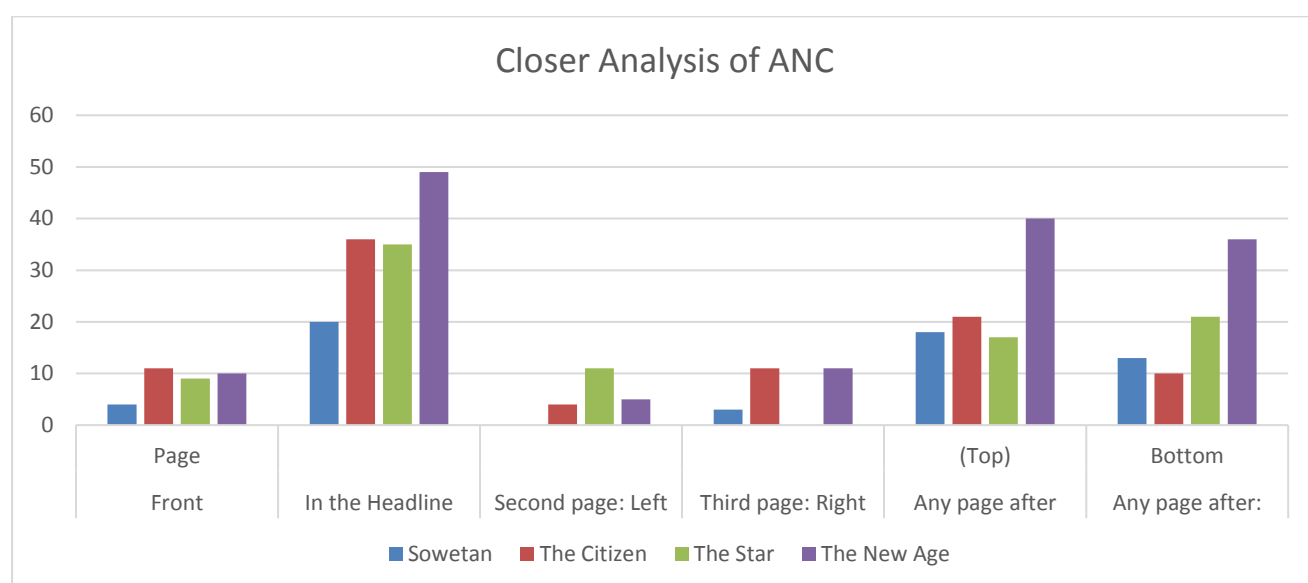
There were very few second page articles featured in *The Sowetan* and *The Citizen*. All were negative about the ANC and related to issue frames of scandal and conflict based on the misappropriation of funds by municipality members and in-fighting. The DA was quoted by *The Sowetan* favourably for driving the investigation into the misappropriation of funds by the ANC. This contributed to the DA's issue frame position and the party's commitment to improving social conditions.

Most of the articles across all the newspapers were in the secondary pages of the publication and primarily located in the top section of the newspapers, albeit there being a notable number of articles also in the bottom part of secondary pages.

### **5.3.1 A closer look at the ANC**

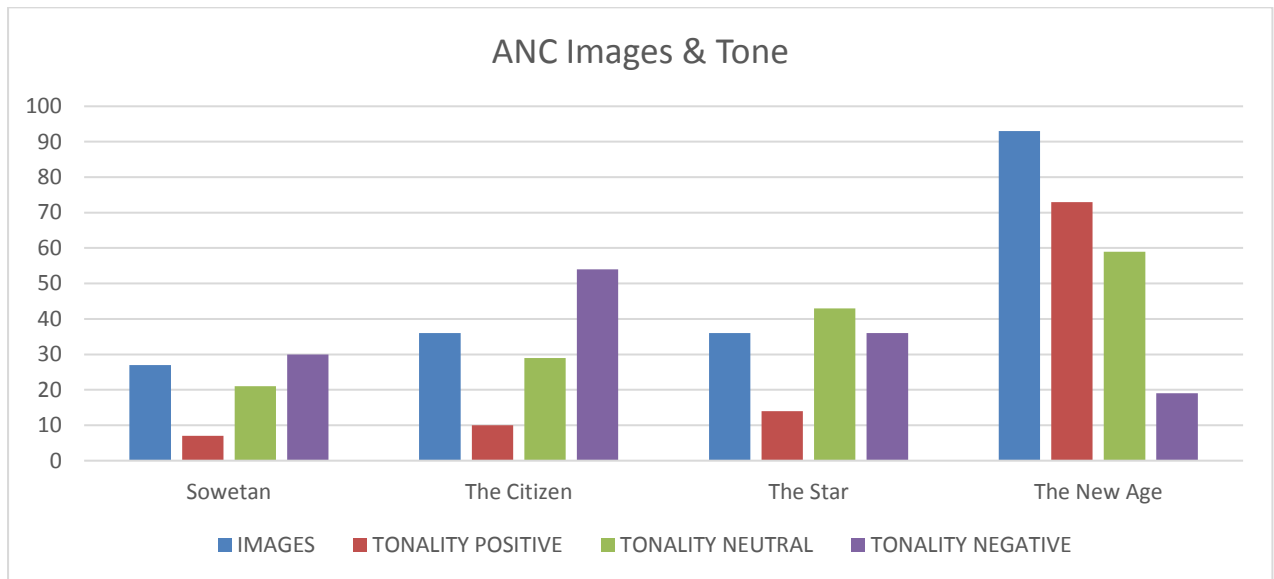
According to Figure 10, *The Citizen* carried the most front page stories (11) while *The New Age* had the most headlines (49) about the ANC. *The Sowetan* is the only newspaper that did not feature the ANC on the second page while *The Star* was the only one not to feature the ANC on the third page. *The New Age* had the highest representation of the ANC in the secondary pages (76) followed by *The Star* (38) and *The Citizen* (31) respectively.

**Figure 10: Closer Analysis of ANC**



As indicated in Figure 11, *The Sowetan* and *The Citizen*'s coverage was fairly similar and was largely driven by negativity (*The Sowetan* 51% and *The Citizen* 58%), closely followed by neutral (*The Sowetan* 36% and *The Citizen* 31%), and only a few positive articles (*The Sowetan* 13% and *The Citizen* 10%). *The Star*'s coverage was mostly neutral (46%) with a notable number of negative (38%) and only a few positives articles (15%). *The New Age* was the only outlier; demonstrating a completely different picture in comparison to the other newspapers – especially *The Sowetan* and *The Citizen*. *The New Age* was largely positive (48%) and closely followed by a notable amount neutral articles (39%) and only a few negative articles (12%). Most of the newspapers had a similar number of images with *The New Age* being the outlier, by a notable margin, once again.

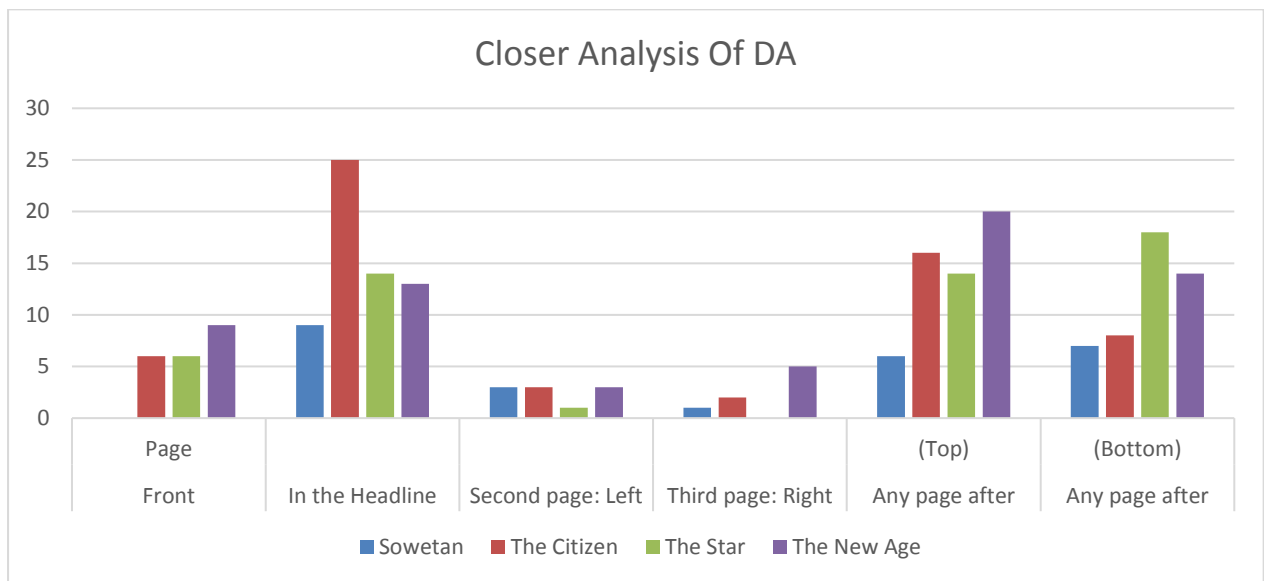
**Figure 11: ANC Images and Tone**



### 5.3.2 A closer look at the DA

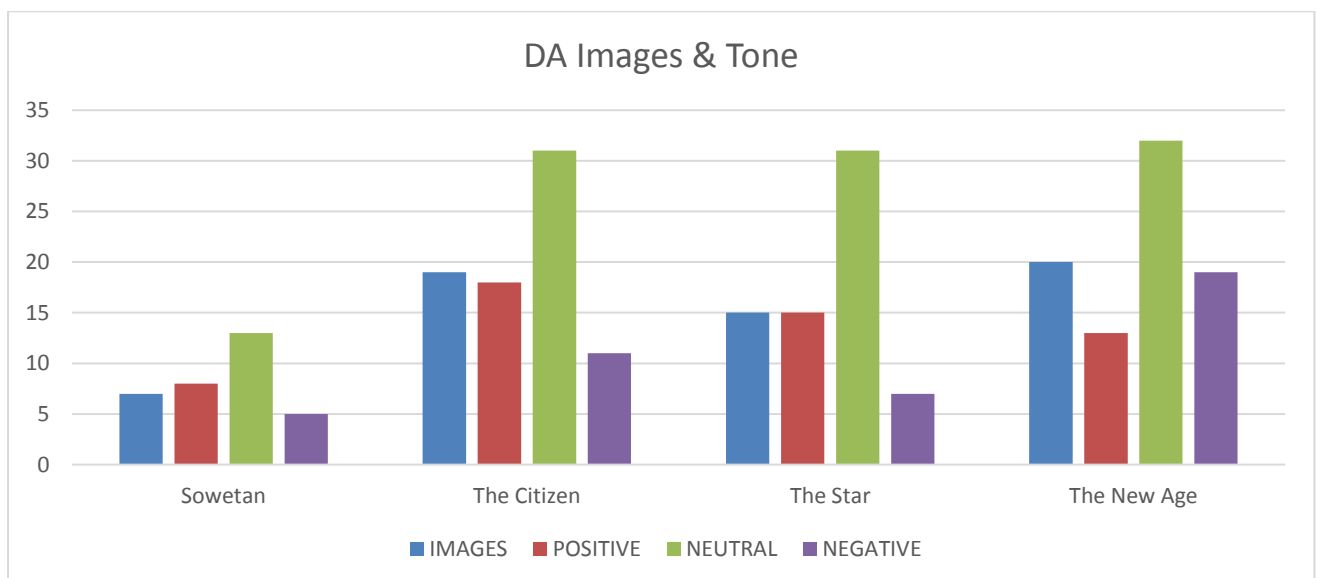
According to Figure 12, most of the DA's coverage (31%) stemmed from *The New Age*, closely followed by *The Citizen* (29%), then *The Star* (26%) and *The Sowetan* (12%) respectively. *The Citizen* and *The Star* had the same amount (6) of front page articles about the DA, while *The New Age* had (9) and *The Sowetan* had none. Compared to its peers, *The Citizen* had the most headlines (25) about the DA, while the margin between *The Star* (14) and *The New Age* (13) is narrow. Furthermore, a considerable (103) amount of DA articles were in the secondary pages, especially when compared to only (18) which featured in the primary pages.

**Figure 12: Closer Analysis of DA**



Most of the DA coverage (52%) was neutral, followed by (26%) positive and only (22%) being negative. Most of the positive sentiments (33%) came from *The Citizen*, closely followed by *The Star* (27%). The negative statements were predominantly from *The New Age* (45%) with some coming from *The Citizen* (26%), *The Star* (16%) and *The Sowetan* (13%) respectively. The amount of images related to the DA was relative to the number of articles about the DA across all the newspapers.

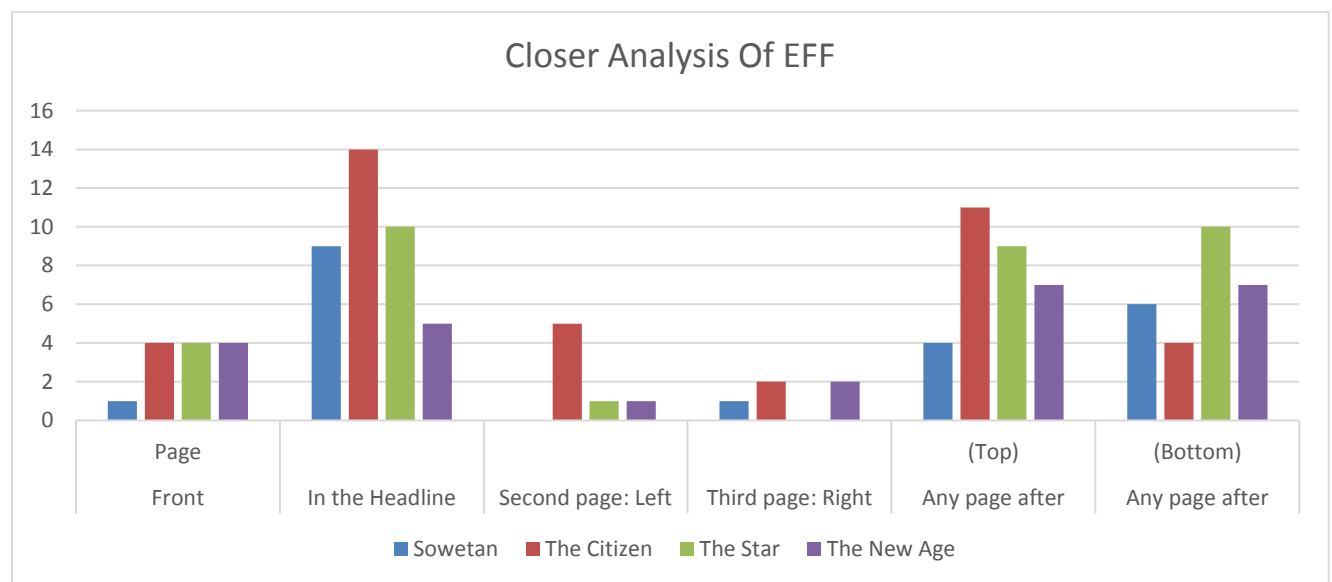
**Figure 13: DA Images and Tone**



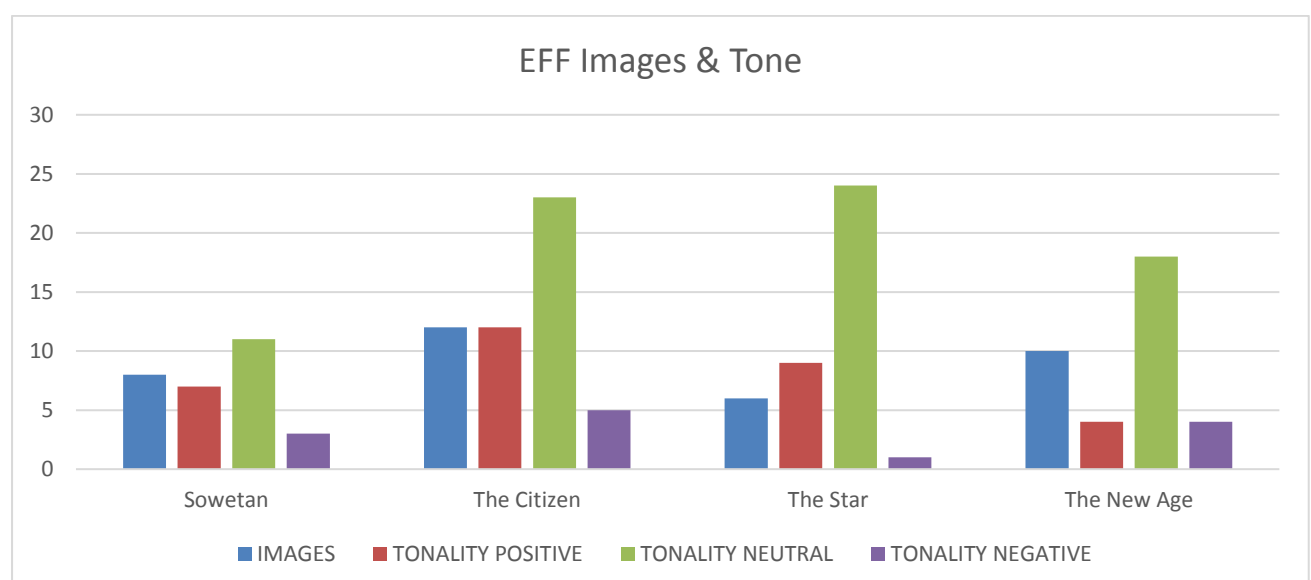
### 5.3.3 A closer look at the EFF

The EFF received most of its coverage from *The Citizen* (33%), followed by *The Star* (28%), then *The New Age* (22%) and *The Sowetan* (17%) respectively. Albeit seldom, the number of times the EFF made front page news is consistent across *The Citizen*, *The Star* and *The New Age*. Compared to peers, *The Citizen* mentioned the EFF in more headlines (14), second page articles (5) as well as the top of secondary pages (11). *The Star* also had a notable amount of headlines (9) as well as secondary page (6) articles about the EFF. This is demonstrated in Figure 14.

**Figure 14: Closer Analysis of EFF**



**Figure 15: EFF Images and Tone**



Most of the EFF's coverage was neutral and consistent across *The Citizen* (30%) and *The Star* (31%), followed by *The New Age* (23%) and *The Sowetan* (14%) respectively.

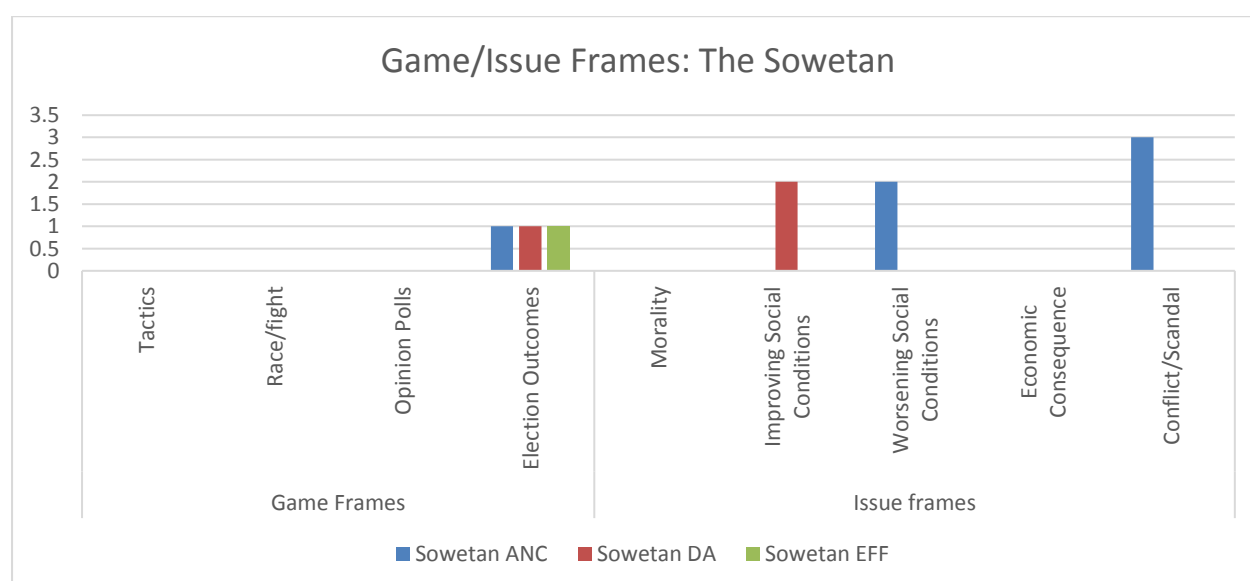
Relatively speaking, there were very few articles on the EFF overall, and even fewer which were negative (10%) – of which, the majority thereof (38%) were from *The Citizen*, followed by *The New Age* (30%), *The Sowetan* (23%) and *The Star* (7%) respectively. Of the total coverage (62%) was neutral across all newspapers, with *The Star* (31%) and *The Citizen* (30%) contributing the most, followed by *The New Age* (23%) and *The Sowetan* (14%), respectively.

The most positive articles about the EFF were from *The Citizen* (37%), then *The Star* (28%), with *The New Age* recording the least (12%) amongst its peers. Most of EFF's images were from *The Citizen*, then *The New Age*, followed by *The Sowetan* and *The Star*.

#### 5.3.4 A closer look at *The Sowetan*

The majority of *The Sowetan*'s media coverage was about the ANC; recording almost double the number of articles as the DA and the EFF. Almost half of all the coverage about the ANC was negative. This was driven by headlines related to in-fighting, corruption and members taken to court within the ANC. This contributed to various issue frames related to worsening social conditions.

**Figure 16: Game / Issue Frames - The Sowetan**



On the other hand, the sentiment towards the DA and EFF was materially different as both parties were primarily projected in a neutral way, followed by more positive than negative articles. In fact, a notable amount of articles about the two parties were around game frames wherein they were contesting municipalities against the ANC and / or made comments about the ANC's shortcomings and thereby positioning themselves favourable by commenting on their plans or actions in addressing ANC's misconduct. In so doing, the DA and EFF generated positive issue frames around social and / or economic matters.

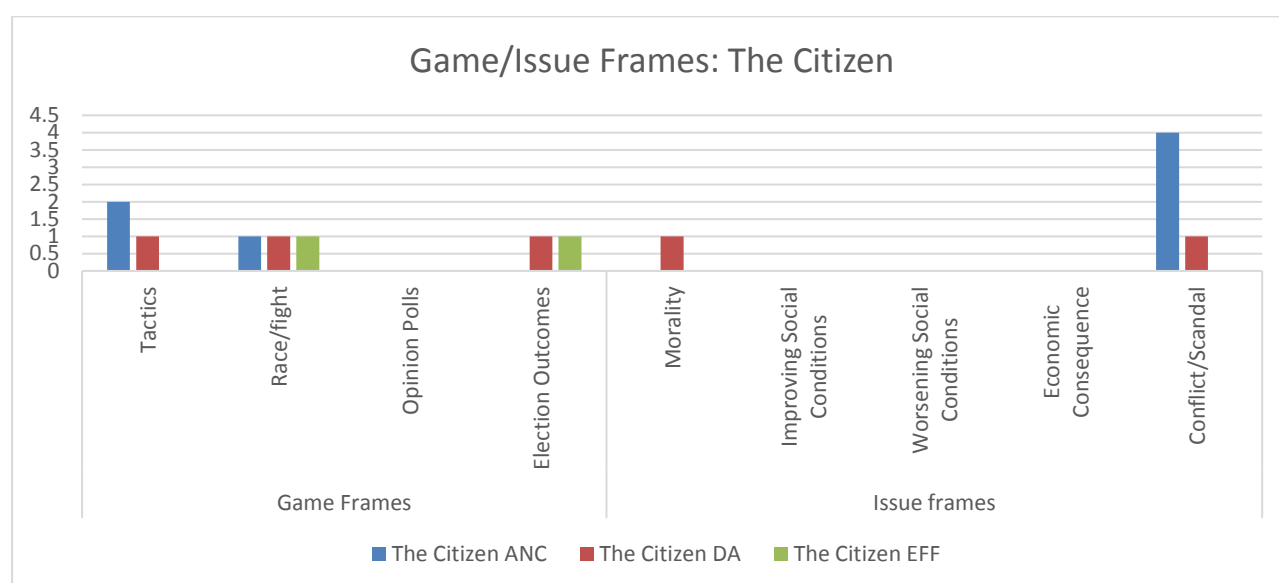
#### *5.3.5 A closer look at The Citizen*

The majority of *The Citizen* coverage of the ANC was negative, with the name of the political party frequently featuring in the headline of articles featured in the bottom part of the secondary pages. In fact, compared to other parties, *The Citizen* was the most negative newspaper in general, particularly in its representation of the ANC.

On the other hand, the DA enjoyed a lot of positive coverage in *The Citizen*. There were notable number of front page articles and the party was also often mentioned in headlines across the various sections of newspaper – especially in the second page or top part of secondary pages.

*The Citizen* gave EFF the most coverage, compared to the other selected newspapers. The amount of coverage the EFF received across all newspapers, *The Citizen* (when compared to the other two parties) was predominantly neutral, followed by a healthy dose of positive coverage. A notable amount of this coverage included headlines, largely concentrated within the top part of secondary pages

**Figure 17: Game / Issue Frames - The Citizen**



A notable number of the articles centred on the ANC's game frame wherein it was indicated that the party was likely to lose voters, in part, due to issue frames around leadership disagreements within the party and unethical matters that contributed to the scandal / conflict frames. There were also a number of game frames related articles linked to tactics employed by the other parties to gain more voters where the ANC struggled.

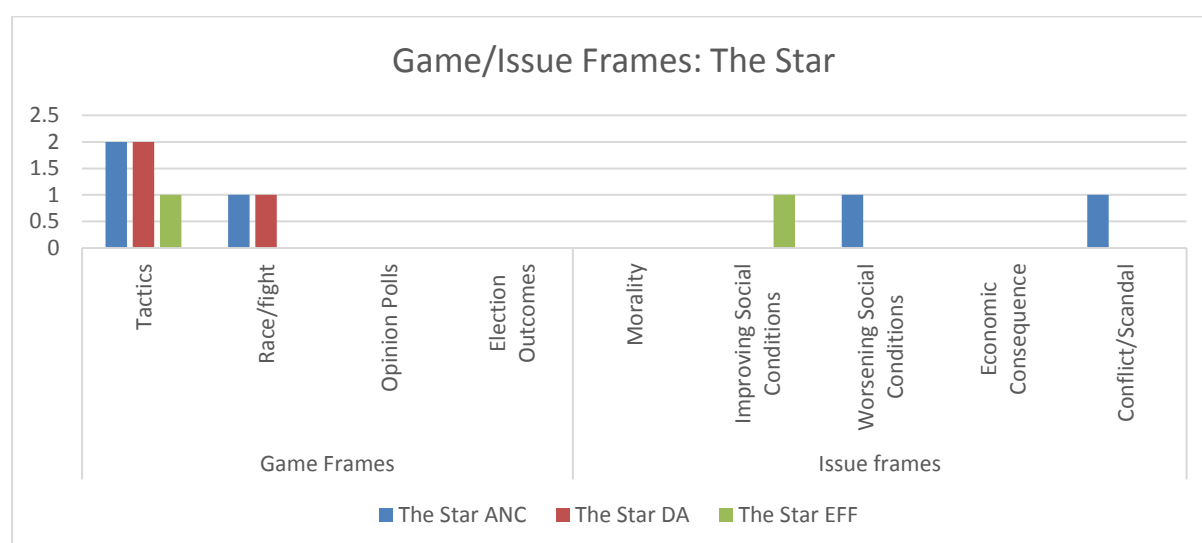
For the DA, coverage was balanced across game and issue frames wherein the DA was often quoted positively on how they are contributing to social, economic and moral issues as well as how they are competing with the ANC and that they stood a reasonable chance of gaining more voters. As for the EFF, most of the coverage was on game frames related to how the party was likely to attract voters, especially away from the ANC.

### 5.3.6 A closer look at *The Star*

*The Star* was the most balanced of all the selected newspapers – with the highest number of neutral articles for all the three parties and also evenly spreading the coverage across all parts of the paper.



**Figure 18: Game / Issue Frames - The Star**



However, in relative terms there were very few positive articles about the ANC in *The Star* as most were neutral, with a notable number of frames centred around the party's issue frames on scandal / conflict, internal squabbles, mismanagement as well as game frames related to how both the DA and EFF were employing various tactics to take advantage of the party's shortcomings, and in so doing potentially increasing their chances of attracting more voters for themselves.

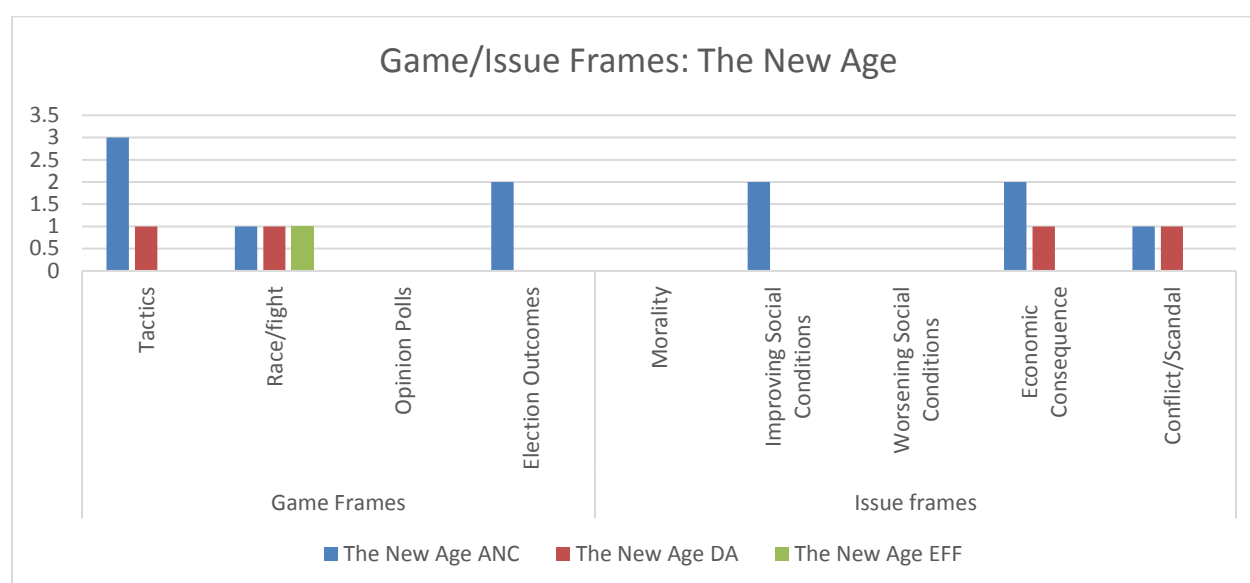
Not much stood out about the DA in *The Star*. Most of the articles were neutral and focussed on the game frames of election tactics and various predictions around their performance within the elections. A very similar trend was observed about the EFF.

### 5.3.7 A closer look at *The New Age*

*The New Age* is a complete contrast to the other selected newspapers, across most of the units of analysis. Some of the key insights that stand out about *The New Age* centre around the fact that, unlike all the other selected newspapers, the newspaper was overwhelmingly positive about the ANC, and at best - neutral about the EFF and definitely negative about the DA.

The DA only received 20% positive coverage, 50% being neutral and 30% negative in *The New Age*. Similarly, the majority of EFF's coverage in *The New Age* was neutral with the balance evenly split across negative and positive.

**Figure 19: Game / Issue Frames - The New Age**



The ANC received prime position across all parts of the newspaper, and far more often than any of the other parties. Even though the game and issue frames were similar to the other newspapers they were far more balanced about the ANC.

## 5.4 Interpretation

At the outset, and as stated in the limitations section of this study, it is worth recalling that opinion pieces, letters, editorial pieces, cartoons and the like were excluded from this analysis. Only articles in the main body of the newspapers were analysed.

From a quantitative perspective, the most fundamental finding which also influences most of the insights, is that the ANC had far more prominence than the other two parties – with almost double the number of mentions than the DA and almost three times that of the EFF. In addition, the editorial gap between the DA and EFF is also significant. This is primarily because the ANC is the ruling party and as such, there will be more coverage about it from that perspective as well. Another part of the vast difference in the amount of coverage when comparing the ANC to the DA and EFF is because the former was referenced in many of the other two parties' articles, especially when comparing how either of the two parties may or aim to improve where the ANC is deemed to have failed, or how the DA and / or EFF have or plan to attract ANC voters.

On the other hand, it was seldom that the DA was quoted as opposing or compared to the EFF, and vice-versa. In addition, the EFF campaigns, especially in provinces such as the Western Cape where the DA often featured contesting with the ANC were relatively few. On the other hand, there were a lot of articles solely about the ANC or referring to other parties such as the African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP) and / or the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).

This is not necessarily surprising especially since the context section within the introduction chapter of this study demonstrated that for almost two decades, the ANC had enjoyed the majority of the electorate's support in South Africa, albeit regressive over time. The DA gained more popularity in the mid - 2000s, and the newcomer; the EFF had demonstrated notable growth since its formation in 2013.

While the DA and EFF may have grown from strength to strength and may be closing the gap, a result of more media coverage than they may have had in previous elections; it would appear that the original gap may have been significantly too large to fundamentally change the coverage volumes per political party leading up to, and during the 2016 local government elections.

From a qualitative perspective, the most notable insights are centred on the amount of extensive and the positive sentiment that *The New Age* gave to the ANC, and how neutral to negative this newspaper was about the DA and EFF in the limited coverage that it did provide to these two parties.

The fact that *The New Age* was the only outlier when it came to overall positive tonality – and by a notable margin compared to the other newspapers combined suggests a different, yet singular representation of the ANC. The other newspapers were predominantly neutral to negative on the ANC. Furthermore, it is only in *The New Age* where the DA and EFF are primarily projected more negative than neutral or positive.

It would appear in a lot of instances – and as highlighted by the DA, that the ANC led government was deliberately blurring the lines by orchestrating election campaign events disguised as government service delivery events. *The New Age* did not make this distinction for its readers, and often quoted the government officials saying 'ANC led government' during such events.

This is even more glaring because in the instances where the other newspapers did publish such government responsibility events, they reported on them as government, instead of ANC led government events.

The fact that there is a newspaper that carries so many positive government service delivery events – more than corporate or other sector's events becomes questionable as a result. *The New Age* is the only one out of the selected newspapers that had articles about every single province, in every single edition, wherein government news consistently took up a notable part of the newspaper – in most cases, more than any other matters.

However, the DA did not receive similar coverage by *The New Age* in municipalities which it ran such the Western Cape. In fact, *The New Age* focused on other ANC based events within the same province – such as the regional chairman who was campaigning despite disagreements with the national office. It is worth noting that this in-fighting within the ANC was reported negatively in most instances by all, including *The New Age*.

In terms of frames, the selected newspapers focused more on game rather than issue frames. Broadly speaking, the coverage was dominated by surveys, polls and predications on who was likely gain more voters at which other party's expense. *The New Age* had more polls which consistently indicated that while the ANC might lose voters in parts, it would remain dominant to a large extent. The political parties' tactics were often reported on, with the DA's "Mandela" ploy receiving a lot of positive coverage across most newspapers – and predominantly neutral to positive. In relative terms, there were fewer issue frames, and these were predominantly around conflict / scandal frames – largely associated with various forms of in-fighting and / or mismanagement of funds or municipalities by the ANC. This was across the selected newspapers, albeit the tone being more negative in the other newspapers than in *The New Age*

Collectively, the number of articles about the ANC and their relative prime position across all the newspapers suggests a level of parity and that perhaps the volumes were warranted since they are consistent. The fact that the DA and EFF also received similar amounts and position of coverage across all the newspapers also supports this notion of balanced reporting. However, the key differentiator was the tonality adopted by the selected newspapers.

Lastly, it was noted that *The Citizen* had the second highest amount of newspaper coverage, and was negative towards the ANC and neutral on the DA and EFF. While the tone and use of images across *The Star* and *The Sowetan* were balanced across these two newspapers, *The Citizen* had a disproportionately higher negative record of the ANC. For instance, far more than the other newspapers, *The Citizen*'s coverage of the ANC often seemed to suggest that the party would lose voters, in part, due to issue frames related to internal leadership battles and unethical behaviour. However, coverage of the DA was far more balanced and positively positioned on how they are contributing to social, economic and moral issues. Even the EFF coverage was positive and centred around how they were likely to attract voters, especially away from the ANC.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This chapter presented all the qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The discussion began with an overview of the quantitative and qualitative findings followed by a detailed analysis of each political party and newspaper. Graphs were employed to provide a visual representation of data across multiple metrics. The chapter ends with an analysis of the findings which informed the subsequent interpretation of this study.

## CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1 Summary

Based on the literature review conducted, the researcher was not able to find academic literature that relates to media owners' influence on editorial content in South Africa – especially related to elections in South Africa. Therefore, it is evident that although there has been a lot of global studies on editorial ownership and bias, none is evident in South Africa. The lack of such research within South Africa, thus necessitated this study.

The study aimed to ascertain editorial bias and to establish if this was caused by the media owners' influence on editorial direction based on their political associations. It is an exploratory and descriptive content analysis of *The Star*, *Sowetan*, *The Citizen*, and *The New Age's* reportage of the three major political parties, namely; the African National Congress (ANC), Democratic Alliance (DA) and Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) during the 2016 Local Government Elections (LGE) in South Africa.

This cross-sectional study took place between 18 July and 05 August 2016, a period marked by intense campaigning which received unprecedented media coverage. These newspapers were selected based on their high circulation figures as well as the diversity of ownership in terms of and difference in owners. It aimed to establish:

- Which newspaper/s showed editorial bias, and towards which political party?
- Which newspaper/s had no editorial bias towards any political party?
- Can any inferences be drawn between the coverage in each newspaper and each of the political parties?

The study used a non-probability sampling method wherein qualitative and quantitative methods, consisting of relatively small, purposive samples from four newspapers and three political parties were used. All articles in the main body of the selected newspapers (excluding opinion pieces and cartoons) which relate to any of the selected political parties were analysed.

To assess bias, the study adopted several units of analysis namely:

- Number of articles per political party.
- Number of articles in or referenced on the front page.
- Number of images per political party in each newspaper.
- Space and position.

To assess frames and infer the potential owner's influence on editorial stance based on their political proximity, the units of analysis were Issue frames, Conflict/scandal frame as well as Game frames. The quantitative content analysis was based on the following steps:

- Step 1 – Constructing categories for the content to be analyse.
- Step 2 - Establishing a quantification system.
- Step 3 - The researcher personally assembled all the quantitative units of analysis by identifying key words then physically counting the number of articles related to each political party in each edition of the selected newspapers.
- Step 4 - Coding the content according to established definitions.

The researcher then adopted the coding process as follows:

- The number of articles and images, the position of the articles and the tonality and the articles.
- Only articles, pictures and illustrations published in the main body of the publications were included.
- Letters to the editor, op ed or opinion pieces were excluded.

## 6.2 Conclusion

Findings from this study reveal that bias can be caused by vested interests. In other words, the media owner's interests could lead to biased reporting. Even through indirect control, ownership can unintentionally influence a lot of individuals or collective elements. This suggests that although media may not be directly or explicitly forced to adopt a specific ideology, it can be argued that political relations with media owners can influence editorial decisions.

The economic goals and / or funding model of the newspaper have a bearing on its editorial position. Independently owned newspapers tend to have more conflict articles than conglomerate-owned newspapers. In addition, political systems can influence editorial processes and result in media focusing more on individuals and conflict reporting rather than substantive election matters.

Although not part of the scope of this study, hence not empirically tested, it can be argued that more than any other party, the ANC deliberately and in certain cases unwittingly created more newsworthy moments and / or contributed to political events that drew the media's attention. In contrast, and although not a unit of analysis for this study, it was interesting to observe that on average, *The Sowetan* had more varied sources of advertisements compared to *The New Age* which consisted mostly of advertisements from the ANC and the government. The DA and EFF did not advertise as much as the ANC, and when they did, it was never in *The New Age*. Furthermore, almost 40% of the ANC's articles were from *The New Age* alone. This contrasted sharply with the DA and EFF in *The New Age*. There were also fewer ANC and / or ruling government advertisements across all the other newspapers. In this vein, it is also worth noting that a notable part of newspaper's income stream is from advertisers.

Therefore, it can be inferred that media owners of *The New Age*, *The Citizen* and *The Star* influenced editorial content of their newspapers during the 2016 local government elections. *The New Age* was biased towards the ANC and against the DA and EFF. *The Citizen* was biased against the ANC. *The Star* was neutral towards all the parties. The positions adopted by



these newspapers were based on the relationships and interests that the respective media owners have with certain political parties.

Overall, it would appear that *The New Age* was positively biased towards the ANC because, not only did it have the most articles on the ANC, but they were also largely positive. On the other hand, *The New Age* not only had far less articles on the DA and EFF but was also largely neutral to negative. This should not be surprising, given that the newspaper is wholly owned by the Gupta family, which as pointed out in the literature review, has very close relationships with the ANC president and various members of the ANC led government. Furthermore, as pointed out in the literature review; media owners, especially when ownership of such rests in the hands of a few, will always pursue their economic interests by affording their political associates a platform to drive their agendas through editorial influence.

The analysis shows that *The Citizen* was the most critical and bias against the ANC. This is not necessarily surprising, especially because *The Citizen* is owned by Moolman and Coburn Partnership (majority shareholding) who has been associated with ANC's deputy president Cyril Ramaphosa, and former ANC National Executive Committee member Tokyo Sexwale. The two have contested the ANC's presidential seat, and as such, may have interest in having the current ANC president poorly represented, so that they can use this to replace him during the political party's next elective conference. This would explain why the owners of *The Citizen* may have influenced editorial stance against the ANC in order to appease their political party's associates, so that when Cyril Ramaphosa contends the presidency; they can be his close allies and beneficiaries.

It is also worth noting that *The Star* was the most the neutral newspaper on all the parties. Looking at its ownership structure, *The Star* has Sekunjalo Media Consortium as its main shareholders. In addition, it has the Government Employee Pension Fund (ANC involvement) as its other main shareholder. As such, it may be challenging to explicitly report negatively about the ANC. Therefore, given the coverage they produced, one cannot say with absolute certainty that there was no editorial influence by the owners because fear of dismissal in itself is a form indirect influence by the owners. This means that a neutral stance is possibly the best position to take – for both journalistic as well as self-preservation interests of the editor and journalists.

*The Sowetan* is owned by Tiso Blackstar Group, a global company with its roots in Africa, operating market-leading media, broadcast and retail marketing properties. *The Sowetan* seemed to be the least involved in the elections. This could indicate that its owners, especially because the majority are foreign nationals and have international interests, were not as involved in the editorial direction of the newspaper. Based on the finding of the study, *The Sowetan* was not bias towards or against any of the political parties reviewed.

In summary, the findings of this study have given substance to the concept of *Editorial politricks* which the researcher defined in the first chapter as the media owner's deliberate use of their media to subliminally drive specific editorial assertions and agendas which maintain and / or advance their political and economic interests. The findings of this study demonstrated how media such as *The New Age* and *The Citizen* had bias news reporting based on their media owner's political relations with various members of the ANC leadership. It became clear that their news did not always serve its primary role of objectively informing the citizenry, but rather become an instrument in the hands of the particular shareholders to advance their specific economic and political interests. In other words, *The New Age* and *The Citizen* attempted to trick its readers through carefully crafted messages and/or omissions of facts and events aimed at creating a subjective view of the ANC which is aligned with the respective media owner's preferences and interests.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Given the findings of this study and the next national elections scheduled for 2019 in South Africa, it is important for more political communication studies to be conducted in order to establish guidelines for unbiased news reporting across all media – including newspapers. Alternatively, to compel media owners to declare their bias towards and against specific political parties in each news content, upfront. Particularly important during election period, is the need for each media (including newspapers) to have an independent editor – potentially one from the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to ensure that each piece of content produced is validated as bias or impartial. This will go a long way in ensuring that voters are made aware of the independence or ideological bias of the media they consume. Failure to establish such a process is tantamount to the academic scholars and national constitution bearers endorsing editorial bias reporting.

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